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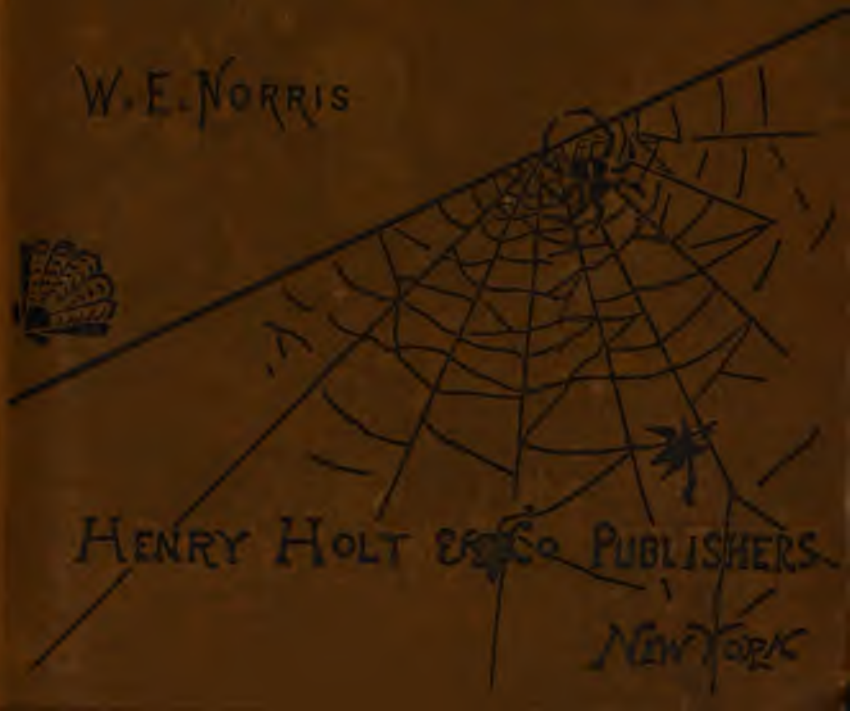
LEISURE HOUR SERIES

MATRIMONY

W. E. NORRIS



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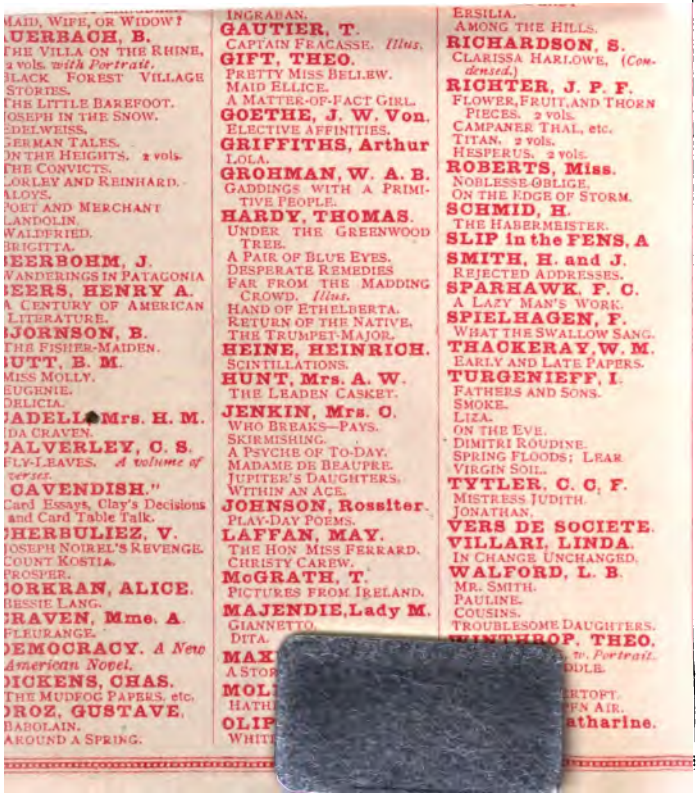

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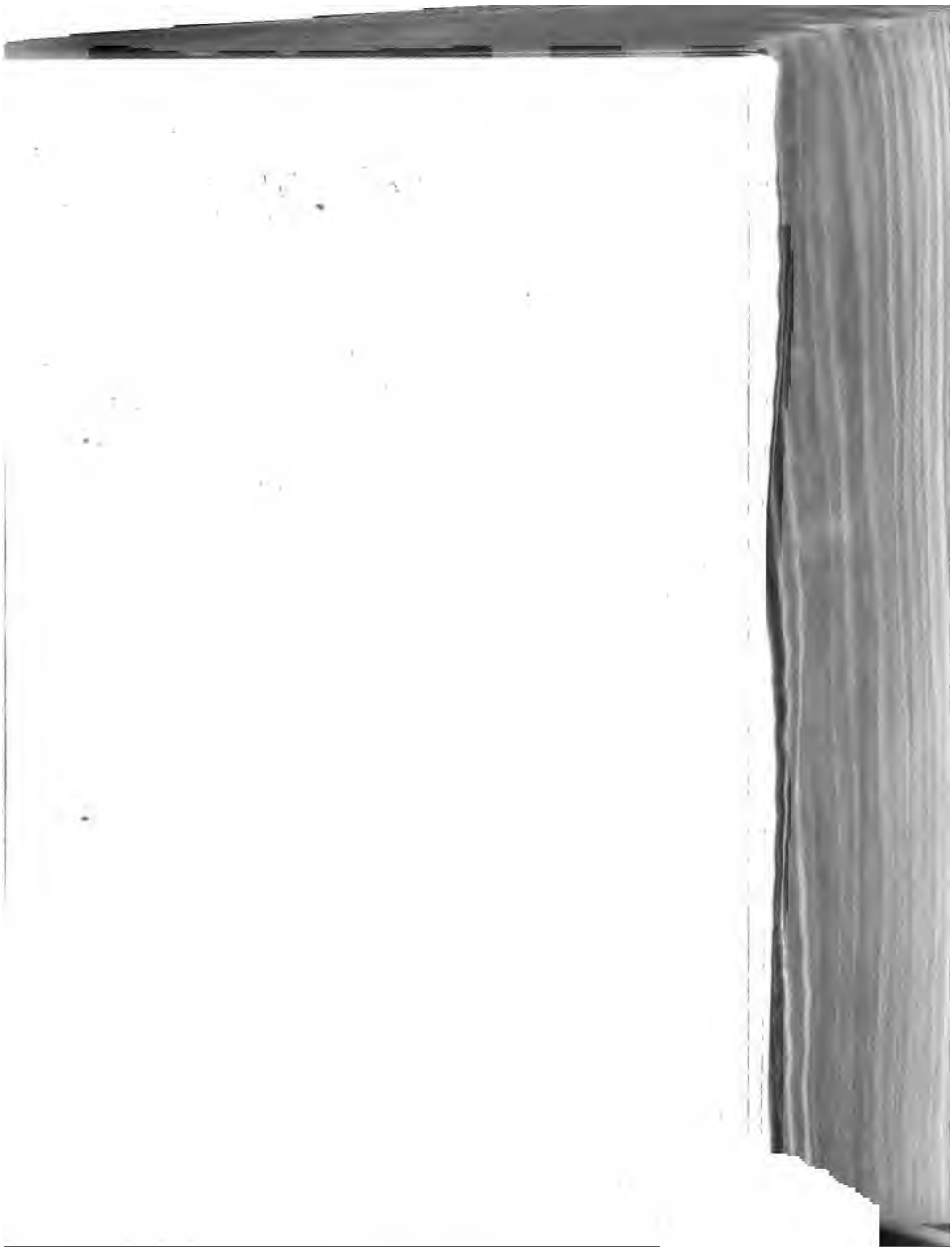

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MATRIMONY

A NOVEL

BY

W. E. NORRIS

Author of "Mademoiselle De Mersac"

NEW YORK
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY
1881

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CONTENTS.

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	TWO YOUNG MEN	1
II.	AN OLD LADY	15
III.	THE OWNER OF SOUTHLANDS	24
IV.	PROVINCIALITIES	39
V.	THE CRUISE OF THE "SIREN"	50
VI.	THE PRINCESS OURANOFF	66
VII.	EXIT VARINKA	79
VIII.	AT THE MOATED HOUSE	87
IX.	AT CROFT MANOR	97
X.	A CORRESPONDENCE	115
XI.	BEACHBOROUGH REGATTA	126
XII.	HOSPITALITY	135
XIII.	TWO DIALOGUES	144
XIV.	MR. FLEMYNG'S DAHLIAS	153
XV.	A RACE-COURSE AND A CATHEDRAL	166
XVI.	FRIENDLY WARNINGS	180
XVII.	THE DAYS THAT ARE NO MORE	190
XVIII.	MR. GERVIS'S VIEWS	199
XIX.	NINA'S VIEWS	208
XX.	PERVERSITY	221
XXI.	PORT STE. MARIE	230
XXII.	A PLEASANT PARTY	244
XXIII.	BEACHBOROUGH PERPLEXED	257
XXIV.	THE RUE D'AMSTERDAM AND THE BOULEVARD MALESHERBES	268

CHAP.		PAGE
XXV.	PRIVATE CRITICISM	277
XXVI.	PUBLIC CRITICISM	292
XXVII.	THE INDISCRETION OF M. HIRSCH	302
XXVIII.	CLOUDS IN THE RUE D'AMSTERDAM	315
XXIX.	IN THE LINCOLNSHIRE WOLDS	329
XXX.	AMONG THE SAND-HILLS	338
XXXI.	EXCELLENT ADVICE	348
XXXII.	A RECOGNITION	360
XXXIII.	A RETROSPECT	370
XXXIV.	THE LESSONS OF EXPERIENCE	383
XXXV.	IRA BREVIS FUROR	397
XXXVI.	THE BEGINNING OF THE END	412
XXXVII.	THE END	427

MATRIMONY.

CHAPTER I.

TWO YOUNG MEN.

IF circumstances should ever lead me to wish for a place in the legislative assembly of my country, I think I should like to sit for Beachborough in the Conservative interest. I cannot imagine a more desirable constituency for one who should understand how to deal with it; and, knowing the place as I have done from my childhood, I flatter myself that I could content the electors with the least possible amount of personal inconvenience. I should never think of addressing them collectively upon political questions, because it would be clearly understood between us that I was upon the right side, whereas the radical minority must, in the nature of things, be upon the wrong, and that it would therefore be a mere waste of time for us to harass one another with matters of detail. All that I should do would be to dress myself very nicely; to saunter up and down the Esplanade, with a beaming aspect, on summer afternoons; to subscribe to the local charities, the band fund, and the harriers; to let it be known that I was upon terms of intimacy with the county families; and, if possible, to show myself occasionally in public arm-in-arm with the Bishop of Lynchester. It would also be advisable to address the House briefly from time to time, so as to give the *Beachborough Chronicle* an opportunity for observing: "We would direct the attention of our readers to the terse and stirring language in which our respected borough member, who is ever at his post when questions of national importance are to the fore, supported the Chancellor of the Exchequer's bill for the extension of the county franchise. Those whose eyes are not blinded by the dust of spite and faction will peruse with genuine delight these utterances of one who, while yielding to no man in veneration for the constitution handed down to us by our forefathers, is yet as quick as his illustrious chief to perceive

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town; nor, as far as that goes, that he would care to take his wife and daughters to such an entertainment at all. At the same time, I am bound to say that these yeomanry officers appear to have strange notions of returning hospitality. I do not attend balls myself, and should not have gone to this one if I had been asked; but I think that I ought to have received an invitation. And I have not received an invitation."

Mr. Pender is a tall, thin, dyspeptic-looking man, who habitually speaks in deliberate, melancholy accents, and his voice, as he announced the unaccountable slight put upon him, was almost tragic. He gives very good dinners; and perhaps that was why the first speaker, a captain in the 121st Fusileers, at that time quartered at Beachborough, responded so readily—

"Not sent you an invitation, Mr. Pender? Oh, there must be some mistake, you know; they couldn't possibly have intended to leave you out. I know young Croft a little, and I'll mention it to him."

"I beg you will do nothing of the kind, Captain Harrison," returned Mr. Pender, with great dignity. "I should consider it most imp—ha—hum—I should be very much annoyed if you were to bring my name forward in that way. It is perfectly clear to me that these gentlemen think themselves too good for Beachborough society, and I can only say it is a great pity that they should have chosen this place for their annual training. Next year, let us hope, they will make a better selection. They will not be missed—they will not be missed."

And a club waiter coming out at this moment, with Admiral Bagshawe's compliments to Mr. Pender, and would he be so kind as to say whether he intended to play whist that afternoon or whether he didn't, the group broke up; and I, following in the wake of the majority, found myself presently in the billiard-room, where two gentlemen in their shirt sleeves were playing pyramids, and where some dozen or so more were regaling themselves with tobacco and one another with the latest gossip.

Is it only old women who spread scandal, and whisper away characters, and find means of laying an extra coat of black paint on to the darkest reputations? I think I know certain persons of the other sex whose bald heads cover brains as small and as active, whose eyes peer through their spectacles at quite as many wonderful sights, and whose tongues wag no less pleasantly behind their false teeth. And if any one is of opinion that those who listen to backbiting are themselves in some sort backbiters, I beg to reply that I am a student of human nature, in which capacity I am compelled

CONTENTS.

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	TWO YOUNG MEN	1
II.	AN OLD LADY	15
III.	THE OWNER OF SOUTHLANDS	24
IV.	PROVINCIALITIES	39
V.	THE CRUISE OF THE "SIREN"	50
VI.	THE PRINCESS OURANOFF	66
VII.	EXIT VARINKA	79
VIII.	AT THE MOATED HOUSE	87
IX.	AT CROFT MANOR	97
X.	A CORRESPONDENCE	115
XI.	BEACHBOROUGH REGATTA	126
XII.	HOSPITALITY	135
XIII.	TWO DIALOGUES	144
XIV.	MR. FLEMYNG'S DAHLIAS	153
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XVI.	FRIENDLY WARNINGS	180
XVII.	THE DAYS THAT ARE NO MORE	190
XVIII.	MR. GERVIS'S VIEWS	199
XIX.	NINA'S VIEWS	208
XX.	PERVERSITY	221
XXI.	PORT STE. MARIE	230
XXII.	A PLEASANT PARTY	244
XXIII.	BEACHBOROUGH PERPLEXED	257
XXIV.	THE RUE D'AMSTERDAM AND THE BOULEVARD MALESHERBES	268

I said I had just arrived from London, and inquired after Lady Croft.

"Oh, she's all right," answered the young man, a momentary cloud passing over his brow. "She's down here; and Florry too. I say, come out and take a turn on the Esplanade; you can't like sticking in this stuffy place on a fine summer's afternoon."

Certainly it was pleasanter out of doors than in. A brisk breeze from the south was chasing little white-crested waves across the blue expanse of the bay; the wooded hills that rise to the westward of the town were half in sunlight, half in shadow; the band of the 121st, installed beneath a freshly painted and gilt kiosk, was playing a selection of airs from "Les Cloches de Corneville," and the *élite* of the resident gentry and visitors (to borrow the favorite expression of the *Beachborough Chronicle*) were promenading slowly up and down within earshot of these lively strains. We joined the crowd; and my companion was pleased to be extremely facetious at the expense of some of its members.

"I'll trouble you for those two girls with the frizzed hair!—did you ever see anything like them out of the Zoo? Well, they're the beauties of Beachborough, and some of those 121st fellows are always after them. That parasol with the white lace that the one on the off-side is carrying is a joint affair: she and her sister have it turn and turn about. I know, because, the other day, while they were sitting down, I came behind them and dropped a spark from a fusee on to it, so as to recognize it again. Here comes General Blair, with his wife in her purple silk. By Jove! I shouldn't care to be in the General's shoes. Do you know why she always wears her bonnet and cap-strings tied under her chin, like that? Why, because she has a beard three inches long. She has, really. Pilkington saw it the other night at a dinner-party, and he swears it gave him the jumps to that extent that he couldn't eat a thing afterwards. Look at old Miss Pennefather prancing along, with her nose in the air. That old girl will have a bad accident one of these days if she will go on carrying her head so high, and not looking where she's going to. Somebody asked my mother to call upon her last year, and a week afterwards she turned up at Croft to return the visit—drove all the way in a one-horse fly. We were sitting in the music-room—you know the room; you go down three steps into it—when she arrived. In she comes, all smiles, tossing her old head and holding out both her hands,—never sees the steps—comes down with no end of a clatter on her nose and knees—recovers herself badly, staggers on for a yard and a half, and

then hurls herself into the arms of old Courtney, who was sitting bolt upright in his chair as usual, and sends his hat spinning in one direction and his tea-cup in another. You ought to have seen Courtney's face. I wouldn't have missed it for a hundred pounds."

And at the recollection of this delightful episode Freddy broke into a peal of laughter which might have been heard from one end of the Esplanade to the other. The passers-by smiled back upon him good-naturedly enough, and seemed to take no offense when these outbursts of merriment were renewed again and again, though I fear that it must have been sufficiently obvious, from the manner in which my light-hearted friend nudged me with his elbow and even pointed with his stick, that the subjects of his jokes were not very far away. Beachborough is nothing if not decorous, and I have little doubt that if a member of its own society—myself, for instance, or one of the officers of the 121st—had chosen to behave in this obstreperous fashion, he would have been made to feel that he was misconducting himself; but a baronet with large estates in the county is a privileged person; and, indeed, it was only a few days later that Miss Pennefather asked me whether I did not think Sir Frederick Croft a delightful young man. "So unaffected, and so full of fun," she said.

For my own part, it amused me very well to lean against the iron railings, with my back to the sea, and listen to my companion's candid remarks upon the ladies and gentlemen who defiled past us, though I confess that their appearance did not move me to laughter quite so easily as it did him—perhaps because I knew them all so well. But at length two total strangers hove in sight, and I was roused to attempt a little criticism on my own score.

"Who on earth can that over-dressed old woman be?" says I, not very prudently. "The young lady with the startling complexion and the finely developed bust is her daughter, no doubt. Have they come down here with designs upon the regular army or the auxiliary forces, I wonder?"

Freddy's countenance changed a little. "Oh, those are the Lamberts," said he. "Awfully nice people. I'll introduce you, if you like."

So this was the "vulgar girl from nobody knew where," and her mamma. I got a bow, or rather a nod, from each of the ladies when my name was mentioned; but neither of them appeared to think my original observation on the fineness of the afternoon worthy of notice, and they turned their whole attention forthwith to my neighbor, whom they, so to speak, surrounded and took possession of in a somewhat ostentatious manner.

"We have been looking for you *everywhere*, Sir Frederick," said the elder of them reproachfully. "I am afraid you forget your appointments very easily."

"Never, Mrs. Lambert, I assure you. I couldn't be *everywhere*, could I? but if you had looked for me on the Esplanade, where we arranged to meet, you would have found me vainly sweeping the horizon in search of you with Knowles's eyeglass: wouldn't she, Knowles? And here have I been for the last three quarters of an hour."

"Oh, Sir Frederick, Sir Frederick! we arranged to meet at the end of the pier, as you know very well. Perhaps you made *two* appointments, and we are interfering with some one else who is looking out for you. Shall we go home and leave him, Kate?"

"Nonsense, mamma," returned Miss Lambert, briskly. She was certainly a handsome young woman, though it was obvious that she had made use of art to enhance the charms bestowed upon her by Nature. "Where shall we walk?" she continued, addressing my young friend, who, with his elbows resting on the railings, was contemplating her admiringly. "Shall we go down to the harbor and see the yacht that came in this afternoon? I want to have a nearer view of her, and I am sick of hearing the band play."

"All right," answered Freddy laconically, straightening himself up, and stepping to her side.

And so the pair coolly marched off, leaving me to follow them with the duenna. I did not want to walk with Mrs. Lambert; neither, to judge by her manner, did she particularly want to walk with me; but one can't always select one's companions in this world, and I thought it would be rather too ill-natured to face to the rightabout, and let the old woman choose between playing gooseberry or loitering behind alone. Moreover, I am not easily bored, and can amuse myself by watching the ways of old, as well as of young women. This one belonged to the class which flourishes in watering-places and is to be found in great profusion, during the summer months, at Swiss *tables-d'hôte* and German springs. She wore a great many bracelets; a broad gold chain, from which a locket depended, encircled her throat; her pale yellow gloves were too tight for her, and were a little grimy about the knuckles; she moved with a slow, majestic gait, and allowed her dress to trail in the dust. As she knew nothing about the stranger to whom she had just been introduced, she was pleased to adopt a strictly guarded attitude, receiving my advances with some hauteur, and being careful to give tone to her remarks by many references to the peerage. I always make it

a rule to suit my conversation to my company, so whenever she mentioned her dear friend Lady This, I promptly retorted with my aunt the Marchioness of That; and thus we advanced, upon terms of mutual distrust, till we reached the quay, beside which the beautiful *Siren* was lying, with her sails still in confusion on her deck.

When we came up, Freddy, who knows about as much of ship-building as he does of Sanskrit, was bending down to survey the yacht's lines, with his hands on his knees and that unnaturally wise expression on his face which I have seen him assume when asked to give an opinion upon a horse, while Miss Lambert was exclaiming, in a loud voice, "What lovely white decks! what a charming broad staircase!—companion, one ought to call it, oughtn't one? I *must* know who the owner is; I should like to make his acquaintance. Do call that man, Sir Frederick, and ask him who his master is."

"Take care," said Freddy, looking rather alarmed; "they'll hear you on board."

"Well, and if they do? I suppose they won't run out and bite me, will they? I'll ask myself, if you are too shy. I say, my man, what is your master's name?"

The weather-beaten, good-humored-looking skipper who was thus unceremoniously hailed, advanced to the side, looked up at his fair questioner with some amusement and a good deal of admiration, raised his finger to his gold-laced cap, and answered, "Mr. Gervis, miss."

"Jervis, Jervis," soliloquized Mrs. Lambert, whose voice was as loud as, and rather deeper than her daughter's. "I know all Lord Castlecourt's family; but they call themselves *Jarvis*. There are the Jarvoises of—"

But at this point Mrs. Lambert faltered and stopped short; for, while she had been speaking, a young man had appeared at the top of the companion, and it was evident that her speculations had been overheard.

"We spell our name with a G.," said he composedly. "I don't know whether that will help you at all."

I hope Mrs. Lambert felt as uncomfortable for the next few seconds as I did; but the awkwardness of the situation was put an end to by an exclamation from Freddy.

"By Jove! then it's the man himself! I was wondering whether by any chance it could be you. Gervis, old boy, don't you know me?"

"Why, I do believe it's little Croft!" cried the other, after a moment of hesitation.

"Of course it is. Where on earth have you been hiding yourself all these years? Nobody seems to have heard a word

of you since you left Eton. I thought you must be dead—I did, really."

"Oh, I have been abroad," answered the yachtsman, who had now stepped on shore, and while he and his former school-fellow were shaking hands and questioning one another, I had time to form a guess at his identity.

With the exception of my grandmother, I suppose that no one in Beachborough was ever upon speaking terms with old Colonel Gervis. He was an awful and somewhat mysterious personage, who used to strike terror into my boyish soul, upon the rare occasions of his visits to South Crescent, by glaring at me in silence, and then asking me abruptly how long it was since I had been flogged, and who, in after years, never deigned to take any notice of me at all. I have heard the story of his life scores of times from my grandmother; but it is not relevant to the matter in hand, and readers shall not be troubled with it. All that Beachborough knew of him was that he was a soured ill-tempered old man, who had quarreled with all his friends, and who dwelt in complete solitude at Southlands, his house on the hill behind the town, seldom stirring beyond his own park gates, and admitting no visitors within them. All sorts of stories were current about his eccentric habits, his supposed great wealth, and so forth; but the man lived so entirely apart, that even Beachborough could not find much to say about him, and less interest was felt in him personally than in the question of who would succeed to his property at his death. As to whether Southlands was entailed or not there was some uncertainty; but it had been ascertained that the old gentleman had a half-brother living; and with regard to this half-brother, rumors of a not very satisfactory kind were afloat. Some people, it is true, averred that he was nothing worse than a valetudinarian, who had fixed his residence abroad from considerations of health; but the majority inclined to the belief that, if he had not been transported for felony, he had at least been compelled to fly the country by reason of his debts; and, as Admiral Bagshawe would often remark, "A man doesn't keep away from England summer and winter unless there's a good reason for it. Don't tell me. Has anybody ever seen the fellow's face, or heard of anybody else who has?" This was felt to be very nearly conclusive.

Now, at the time when this story opens, Colonel Gervis had been dead some months, and if I had been in Beachborough during that peroid, I should doubtless have heard many a bold surmise and authoritative statement as to the advent of the heir. Having been absent, I had not given the subject much

thought; but now it did not require the deep mourning in which this young yachtsman was clad to convince me that some relation of the defunct misanthrope had appeared upon the scene at last. And presently all doubt was removed by a remark of Freddy's which I overheard.

"And so you have come to take possession of Southlands, eh?"

To which the other replied, "Well, I have come to try and get things in order a little."

Mrs. Lambert, who had been listening eagerly to the colloquy between the two friends, here glanced involuntarily towards the heights on the further side of the harbor, where the chimneys of Southlands could be distinguished above an intervening belt of trees.

"Is he the heir to that charming place?" she whispered. "How very handsome he is!—don't you think so? And so—so—odd and striking-looking."

The good lady had forgotten all her high-and-mightiness in her thirst for information, and I perceived at once that she must have more than one marriageable daughter on hand. Looking at the new-comer with more dispassionate eyes than hers, I could not but concur in her admiring opinion of his outer man. I sometimes think that Claud Gervis at the age of three-and-twenty was as perfect a specimen of manly beauty as I have ever looked upon. Any one who chooses to stroll from the Palazzo di Venezia to the Porta del Popolo on a fine winter's afternoon, will probably meet two or three faces in the course of his walk which might belong to Claud's twin brother. He will encounter the same regular features, the same soft dark eyes, the same oval contour, and the same clear brown complexion; but it will be strange if he discover upon those placid Roman countenances any trace of that bright vitality and perceptiveness which caused people to turn and look at young Gervis a second time in a crowd; nor is he likely to see beneath them the counterpart of Claud's lithe, wiry figure. The lad puzzled and interested me. He had the head of an Italian poet; but his limbs, his movements, and his clothes were those of an Englishman. He looked as if he might be a joint product of both countries—which was the less surprising, seeing that that was precisely what he was.

After a time, I found myself returning towards the sea front with my old woman, of whose company I was becoming very tired, while the three young ones strolled on ahead; but soon the new arrival, suspecting perhaps that he was impeding the progress of a flirtation, fell back and joined us. Mrs. Lambert, who had recovered quickly from the embarrassment oc-

casioned by the manner of her introduction to this eligible youth, attacked him at once.

"I am so glad to have met you, Mr. Gervis," said she, turning upon him a venerable figure-head wreathed in smiles; "because, do you know, ever since we have been in Beachborough, we have been longing so much to see that lovely place of yours. Now that you have come, I hope you will be very kind, and let us walk round the gardens some day. Flowers are quite a mania of mine—flowers, and—and—shrubs, and—"

"Turf?" suggested the young man. "One generally finds all three in English gardens, and I dare say you will find them at Southlands. On the other hand, there may be no garden at all. I can't say myself, because I never was there."

"Really! This is your first visit to your domains, then? How anxious you must be to see your future home! The late owner, I think, was your—"

"My uncle: quite right. He was half-brother to my father, who is the present proprietor of the place you admire so much. I have come on here to make preparations for his arrival."

"Oh!" Mrs. Lambert could not keep a slight tinge of disappointment out of her voice. But, upon reflection, she brightened up again. "You are an only son, are you not?" said she.

The young fellow laughed outright. "I am at present," he answered; "but I have a step-mother, as you are perhaps aware. I had no idea that people knew so much about us in Beachborough." Then he turned away from her and addressed himself to me. "I have a letter of introduction in my pocket to Mrs. Knowles from my father," he said. "Do you think I might call and deliver it to-morrow? He told me that she was a very old friend of his, and that I was to be sure and find her out at once."

"Come this evening," I responded heartily, seeing a chance of escape from that terrible old Lambert woman; "my grandmother will be delighted to see you."

"But is it not too late?"

"Oh, dear, no; we don't dine till eight, and it is only a few minutes' walk to South Crescent. Good-by, Mrs. Lambert; good night, Freddy." And I hurried my new friend away, without allowing him time to excuse himself. *Sic me servavit Apollo.*

CHAPTER II.

AN OLD LADY.

MY grandmother, dear old lady, is considered on all hands to be a rather alarming personage; and though I, for one, have good reason to know that her bark is worse than her bite, and that there are few kinder hearts or more liberal hands in England than hers, yet I cannot but admit that she has in some degree earned her character. Nobody indeed, can be expected to feel very grateful for the negative benefit of not having been bitten, while it is undeniably a positive nuisance to be barked at; nor do I wonder at the unwillingness of those whose failings lie upon the surface to pay frequent visits in South Crescent. Woe unto those who lisp in their speech, lounge back in their chairs, or deliver themselves of affected sentiments in my grandmother's presence! If they are not lowered several pegs in their self-esteem before they leave the room, the fault will assuredly not lie with that ruthless disciplinarian. I have not forgotten the occasion upon which I incautiously took a friend, who was about to set out upon the now fashionable journey round the world, to one of her afternoon tea-parties, thinking the old lady would feel an interest in so enterprising a traveler, and quite forgetting, for the moment, that he belonged to that class of languid, used-up young men whom she honors with a special measure of contempt.

"And pray, sir, what route do you propose to follow?" she inquired, after taking a grim survey of his well-cut clothes, his patent-leather shoes, and his striped silk stockings.

He looked up, with an evident sense of injury at being called upon to undertake the fatigue of explanations, and began a vague sketch of his programme. First, he said, he should "go to Indiah—get some shooting, perhaps—knock about there for a little. Might go on to Japan afterwards, or Chinah—"

"Oh no, you mustn't go to China," interrupted my grandmother gravely.

"Something to do," suggested the unsuspecting one. "Might as well go there as anywhere else. Why not?"

"I'm told they eat puppies there," says Mrs. Knowles in a loud, clear voice. Her snubs are for the most part of this direct description. One could as easily affect not to notice a slap in the face; and the unfortunate at whom they are

launched has to choose between accepting his chastisement in silence and making himself ridiculous by getting up and taking his leave forthwith. At the time when my revered grandmother mixed a good deal in society, she was considered, I believe, to have a very pretty wit; and if, in the effort to say smart things, she sometimes succeeded only in uttering rude ones, I dare say she merely followed the custom of a generation somewhat more thick-skinned than ours. Nowadays we have forgotten how to be witty; and though doubtless we can be sufficiently rude, after our own fashion, when we please, I think we have learned to be a little more tolerant of the infirmities of our neighbors, and to see that it really is not worth while, for the sake of setting down one obnoxious person, to make a whole roomful of people uncomfortable. For my own part, I declare that I feel so nervous whenever my grandmother is entertaining strangers, that I have long ago abandoned the responsibility of introducing any to her; and I thought it only prudent to speak a word or two of warning to this odd, foreign-looking young Gervis as we drew nearer to our destination.

"You will find my grandmother a little eccentric," I said. "She will very likely make some personal remarks about you; but I hope you won't mind. She is very old, you see, and everybody lets her have her own way."

"I know," answered the young fellow, laughing. "The governor told me all about her; and I think she is just the sort of old person whom I should like beyond everything."

"Maybe so; but it don't follow that *you* are the sort of young person whom *she* will like beyond everything," thinks I to myself, as Mr. Hicks and a subordinate in a striped waistcoat flung back the double doors to admit us.

As it turned out, however, I need not have felt any misgivings. My young gentleman stepped across the long drawing-room, made his bow, and introduced himself with a happy mixture of ease and respect; and I perceived at once that he was not likely to get himself into trouble by the perpetration of solecisms. Mrs. Knowles has always confessed to a weakness for handsome men; and it may have been her visitor's good looks, as well as his good manners, that prepossessed her in his favor. Or possibly the sound of his name may have softened her with the stirring of some ancient memories. It was, at all events, evident that she intended to be gracious to him; and soon they were deep in conversation.

"An old friend? Oh yes, your father is a very old friend of mine in the sense that we were friends in very old days. To be sure, we haven't seen much of one another for a trifle

of forty years or so; but we Careys and Gervises used to be almost like one family when the century was young. Poor George, who died the other day, was my cotemporary; Vincent was many years younger. Long after I was married to Mr. Knowles, and settled down at Stone Hall with half a dozen children to bring up, I remember him as a merry young fellow, riding over from Southlands on summer afternoons, and making us all laugh with his stories of the pranks he and his friends played at Oxford and in London. My husband used to shake his head over it all; and as for old Mr. Gervis—who didn't like paying long bills, you understand—he used to swear Vincent would end upon the gallows; but I always liked him and stood up for him. He was a most amusing rascal and a great chatterbox in those days. You don't recognize that description of your father, eh? Ah, well! time and trouble make changes in us all; and some of us grow silent, and some, like myself, become babblers in our old age. You are not much like a Gervis in face."

"No; I believe not. I suppose I take more after my mother."

"Who was an Italian. Yes, yes; to be sure. An heiress too, if I am not mistaken. After Vincent went into the diplomatic service we didn't see much of him in these parts; but I well remember the news of his marriage coming, and old Mr. Gervis saying, in his grumpy way, 'Well, he has feathered his nest anyhow, and that's something; but he may as well turn foreigner himself now; for his wife shan't enter this house. I'll have no papists here.' And he kept his word. You Gervises are an obstinate, wrong-headed lot, do you know?"

"I don't think my father is."

"H'm! I am not so sure of that. And so now he is coming back to Southlands, after all. Does he mean to live here?"

"Ah, that I can't say. I hope he will; but I don't think he likes England much; and as for Varinka, I doubt whether anything would induce her to make her home out of Paris."

"And, pray, who is Varinka?"

"Oh, my step-mother. We always call her by her Christian name—I don't know why, except that, of course, she is so much nearer our own age than my father's."

"Ah, that Russian princess. I want to hear all about her. I have only seen your father once since his second marriage—that time when he came over to try if he could not hit it off with poor George, and failed. He was a good deal aged and altered then. Mr. Gervis, will you do a kindness to an inquisitive old woman, and stay and dine with us? I can't offer you

French cooking; but Tom there, who is given to self-indulgence, will take care that you have a glass of good claret."

A murmur confirmatory of this promise rose from the arm-chair on the other side of the room, whence I had been idly contemplating the rather picturesque study formed by the figures of the old woman and the lad who sat, facing one another, in a bay-window, their respective profiles clearly defined against the waning light. I have said already that it would be hard to discover a finer specimen of humanity in its prime than Claud Gervis, and it may, I suppose, be added that the human subject in the final term of its career finds no less striking a representative in the person of Mrs. Knowles. I doubt whether grandmamma was ever a beauty; her nose must always have been a trifle too long, her jaws too square, and her mouth too large. But I can imagine that when those sharp little gray eyes were surmounted by eyebrows somewhat less bushy, when the abundant snowy hair under that close fitting quilled cap was black or dark brown, when the little bent figure was straight and strong, and the cheeks, which are sunken now and overspread by a network of delicately traced lines, with here and there a long, deep furrow among them, were round and firm,—I can imagine, I say, that at the time of the battle of Waterloo, Miss Carey may have wrought some havoc among hearts which are now lying cold and quiet in their several family vaults. Now, after a life-journey of over eighty years, Mrs. Knowles's faculties are still in fairly good working order. If she puts on spectacles to read with, she requires no such aid to observe all that goes on about her; her ears are as sharp as her tongue; she scorns easy-chairs; and I believe it is rather for the sake of effect than for use that she carries the stout, gold-headed stick with which Grandpapa Knowles used to support his steps in days gone by.

She and young Gervis sat there, in opposite corners of the window, like allegorical representations of the Past and the Future striving to join hands across the gulf of the Present, and gazed at one another with a certain eager, wistful curiosity—or so, at least, it seemed to me. Every now and again in life some such chance meeting as this startles us with a sudden vision of what we have been, or shall be. Shadows from the half-forgotten years rise up and beckon to us reproachfully; but we cannot return to them: it is as much as we can do if we are able to stretch out our hands longingly towards them, while Time and Fate, inexorable taskmasters, hurry us along the road, at the end of which grim old age sits waiting for us. Nay, it is not even we who were young once, but some one else, who is no more. Who can resist the

universal law of change, or stand still while the tread-mill goes round? One generation passeth away and another generation cometh; and there is one event unto all. I understand that we should wish our friends happiness, since it is undeniable that happiness is not dealt out in equal proportions to mankind; but surely it can only be in irony or thoughtlessness that we drink to their long life. Would you really like to be old? Would you like to linger on here, a worn-out mind inhabiting a worn-out body, alone among strangers, feeling yourself an interloper, yet not caring greatly whether you were so or no, having outlived all that made life worth possessing, and, worst of all, contented, in a dull way, with your sad existence? Is it conceivable that any sane man, who believes in the immortality of the soul, can desire such a fate for himself or for those whom he loves? What must be, must; and, as science advances, length of years seems likely to fall to the lot of an increasing number among us; but it is a thing to be borne, not to be hoped for.

I was moralizing thus, with my usual originality and profundity, when that observation about the claret recalled me to myself and to a sense of physical emptiness, such as healthy men ought to feel towards half-past seven in the evening. Young Gervis was beginning to excuse himself upon the plea that there would hardly be time for him to go back to the yacht and dress; but my grandmother, who is accustomed to obedience, and never gives an invitation unless she intends it to be accepted, did not choose to let him off.

"Pooh, pooh!" she said, "you will do very well as you are, sir. Tom, show Mr. Gervis a room where he can wash his hands, and tell them to lay another place." And so that matter was settled.

Between soup and dessert we heard all about the Gervis family—all, at least, that our guest chose to tell us; and I cannot say that, on this first evening, he struck me as being at all a reserved young man. Cross-examination is always more or less disagreeable, even to those who have nothing to conceal; but he submitted to it good-humoredly enough, answering without hesitation the questions put to him, and speaking in an easy, natural manner of his personal views and wishes. He had been sent straight to Eton, he said, as soon as he was old enough to go to school at all, and had there imbibed a love for his father's country and people which, it appeared, was by no means shared by that gentleman himself. "The governor likes foreigners and foreign life best," he sighed; "and I should like it all too, if I only had to go abroad for the holidays, you know, as I used to do. But one gets sick, in the long run, of knock-

ing about from place to place; without any object before one, except to kill time."

"I dare say one does, after a few years," observed Mrs. Knowles, rather amused with the young fellow's serious air. "And so you have been a long time seeing the world, have you?"

"Oh, yes; ever since I left Eton. I wanted to go to Oxford, but the governor would not let me; and for the last five years we have been yachting and traveling all over Europe, he and I, sometimes taking Gen for a cruise with us—Geneviève is my sister, you know,—but more often dawdling from harbor to harbor by ourselves, making no plans, and giving no address to anybody, so as to be quite free. It has been a pleasant life; but it couldn't go on forever; and I think it is nearly time now that there should be an end of it."

"High time, I should say," agreed my grandmother. "The lady with the funny name don't care about yachting apparently."

"What lady?"

"I mean your father's second wife—Mrs. Gervis—if she calls herself so."

"Oh, Varinka. She is always called Princess Ouranoff. No; Varinka lives in Paris with Gen. Paris is in a sort of way our head-quarters. I am often there; and the governor comes too—sometimes."

"I see," said Mrs. Knowles; meaning, no doubt, to imply that the significance of the word "sometimes" was not lost upon her. "We must get your father to settle down at Southlands," she continued, after a short pause. "As for Princess Thingummy, if England is not good enough for her, I suppose she can't do better than remain in France."

Why is it that, in cases of apparent estrangement between husband and wife, the lady is invariably assumed to be in the wrong by her own sex? My grandmother, who, for all her shrewdness, had a feminine facility for jumping to conclusions, had evidently made up her mind already that the second Mrs. Gervis was no better than she should be, and would have been prepared, had the occasion presented itself, to accord to her such a reception as vice merits at the hands of eighty odd years of virtue.

Claud did not take up the cudgels for the absent Varinka, but responded with some eagerness to the first part of Mrs. Knowles's sentence.

"I wish you would!" he cried. "My great fear is that he will come here on a wet day, or that some trifle will make him take a dislike to the place. If anything of that kind does happen, he will put it into the hands of an agent at once, and be off

before a week is out. Do, please, try and convince him that he ought to be here for at least a part of the year, Mrs. Knowles."

"Of course he ought to be here," replied my grandmother, decisively. "It is not much of a property, to be sure; still, such as it is, it has been in his family for six or seven generations, and there would be just enough to do in managing it to give an idle man an occupation. If telling him his duty in plain language is likely to be of any use, you may count upon me. But I should imagine you would have more influence with your father than an old woman whom he hardly knows," she added, glancing at the young fellow's handsome face, and thinking, perhaps, of her own dead sons.

He shook his head. "I am a mere cipher," he said. "My father is—well, I don't quite know how to describe him; but you will see him yourself before long. As a general rule, people are rather frightened of him, and very few understand him. I do, I think; and we have always been very good friends, and he lets me do exactly as I like in almost everything. But then, he does as he likes too; and if our wishes happen to clash, I go to the wall—as is only natural. For instance, I wanted to go into some profession; but that did not suit him, so I had to give up the idea. Now I want to live in England; and I am very much afraid that that will not suit him either."

"In matters of personal convenience, old folks ought to give way to young ones," said my grandmother.

And with that unhesitating assertion, which sounded a little strangely, coming from one whose children and grandchildren have been accustomed to hear sustaining a diametrically opposite theory, she took up her shawl and her gold-headed cane, and left us to finish the claret.

Theory and practice have so little to say to one another, alas! It would have been personally convenient to me, any time during the last quarter of a century, to be allowed to smoke an occasional cigar or two, at night, in some part of the house in South Crescent; but as I have never had the audacity even to hint at such a wish, I am in the habit, while staying under my grandmother's roof, of betaking myself to the club about ten o'clock; and thither I presently conducted my young friend.

In the smoking-room we discovered Freddy Croft, together with several other officers of the Royal Lynshire Yeomanry Cavalry, one of whom, with his legs gracefully disposed upon the table before him, was asleep and snoring, while the others were apparently just awake enough to keep their cigars alight and to refresh themselves with occasional draughts from the tall tumblers which stood within reach of their arms. Freddy

seated himself beside us, and explained that they were going to have "a turn at loo" soon, but were waiting until "Old Fireworks"—under which jocular pseudonym I understood him to designate my esteemed friend Admiral Bagshawe—should have gone home to roost.

"He's upstairs, having his last rubber of whist, and a deuce of a long time he takes over it too," said the impatient gambler. "Somebody told Lynchester we had better not show in the card-room till he had cleared out. It seems they have some rule here about not allowing games of chance, and this superannuated ass might make it unpleasant for us, they say, because he's in no end of a rage at not having been asked to our ball. You'd think an old fossil like that wouldn't care much about balls; but there's no pleasing some people. By the by, Gervis, you must honor our hop with your company, it'll be the grandest sport you ever saw. All the men ask their friends, you know—in fact it's supposed to be their ball really,—and half of them are sure to be screwed before the evening is over. You're coming, of course, Knowles?"

"Well, no. I am in the same boat with Admiral Bagshawe and the other fossils," I replied; "I haven't been asked."

"Oh, that was because nobody knew you were here. You shall have a card to-morrow morning. The fact is, Lynchester didn't want to invite any Beachborough people at all. He said they'd only make unpleasant remarks about everybody, and ten to one they'd stay to the end, and spoil all the fun. However, Lady Lynchester and my mother and some of the other ladies went to him, and told him it would never do; and now, I believe, a good lot of the natives are coming. I don't know why old Bags was left out, I'm sure."

"I think," observed the sage and experienced person to whom this information was communicated, "that Lord Lynchester and all of you are making rather a mistake. You will earn far more enemies for yourselves by inviting half the town than by inviting nobody; and, after all, it is always better to avoid making enemies."

"Ah, yes; so some of the fellows were saying. But Lynchester is a queer-tempered chap, you know. He isn't best pleased at the way people here have talked about him already; and if he was bothered any more about this ball, the odds are that he'd give them something to remember him by. Get into the cloak-room, and fill all their pockets with jellies and creams, or something of that kind, don't you know."

"Who is Lord Lynchester?" Gervis asked. "I think I should rather like to know him."

Freddy pointed to the sleeping form in the arm-chair, and

explained that his lordship was the Colonel of the Lynshire Yeomanry, and the largest landed proprietor in the county.

"I don't know whether you'll exactly like him," he added, doubtfully; "it isn't every one who does. But of course you must know him, if you're going to settle down here. Come and take a hand at loo with us presently, and I'll introduce you to him, and to most of your other neighbors too."

"Very well," answered Claud, after a moment of hesitation. "Only I don't want to play for high stakes or to lose much money, Croft."

"All right, old man; you can stop whenever you like. I've been dropping rather more than I care about lately myself; so to-night I've only brought a fiver in my pocket, and as soon as that's gone I shall shut up."

Claud said he did not mind going as far as five pounds; and soon afterwards the veterans were heard stumping down the staircase; the sleeper awoke; the other young men rose and stretched themselves; and presently I was left in sole tenancy of the smoking-room. It was not suggested that I should join the loo party; nor, indeed, should I have thought for a moment of doing so, had I been asked, though it is possible that, like Mr. Pender, I might have felt flattered by having the option offered to me. That is the worst of associating with young men: they are forever unconsciously reminding one that one is no longer young one's self.

"'Something we gain with age; but youth has departed,'" thinks I to myself, as I stroll along the sea front under the stars, and let myself in with my latch-key into the hall, where Hicks is waiting to open a bottle of soda-water for me, and to ask a few questions about the young gentleman as they do tell him is a nephew of hold Colonel Gervis of Southlands. Ah, Hicks, my old friend, do you remember the days when that latch-key was put into requisition at hours of which you were careful to keep your respected mistress in ignorance? You are discreet, Hicks, and you do not remind the middle-aged gentleman who steps in so demurely at eleven o'clock that he, too, once knew something of the seductive game of loo; you allude no longer to the terrible headaches he sometimes woke with of a morning, nor to those cunningly devised potions by means of which you enabled him to present himself at the breakfast-table, and go through the appearance of eating. Another race hath been, Hicks, and other—h'm! well, never mind about the palms. Every dog has his day; and now that mine has passed by, I have the more leisure to contemplate the proceedings of my successors in those flowery, thorny paths which I have left behind me. From the serene height of middle-age I look down

upon them—upon their laughter and dances, their vain ambitions, their foolish loves, their absurd stumblings and flounderings. Can you for one moment suppose that I would step down again and join them, if I could? Do you imagine that anything would induce me to sit up till the small hours, gambling with Lord Lynchester and his friends, like those two silly youngsters? No, no, Hicks, you are too well acquainted with me to misjudge me so greatly. I know that in your heart you have a profound respect for me, as for a man of the world, who takes proper care of his health and his comfort, who has contrived to steer clear of the shoals of matrimony, and who has ever kept a steady eye upon the main chance. Hand me my flat candlestick, Hicks, and let me go upstairs and get to bed before midnight, as all respectable persons should. I envy no man, and would not exchange the accumulated wisdom of five-and-forty years against all the callow dreams of early life. At the same time, I think those revelers might have gone through the form of asking me to join in their game.

CHAPTER III.

THE OWNER OF SOUTHLANDS.

THERE was a great disturbance, I remember, in the Beachborough Club when a modest, but resolute phalanx of members, headed by Mr. Warde, the clergyman of the parish, declared their intention of enforcing the rule prohibiting conversations to be carried on in the reading-room. Putting a strictly literal interpretation upon the statutes of the establishment, it was not to be disputed that the malcontents had right on their side; but on the other hand, there was a general feeling that such old and influential residents as Admiral Bagshawe, General Blair, and a few others, were privileged persons, and that an attack directed against one of their most cherished habits assumed at once something of a personal character. In this light, indeed, it was regarded by the Admiral himself, who summoned an extraordinary general meeting of the club forthwith, and delivered himself thereat of a speech so eloquent, and so full of sarcastic allusions to gentlemen who were not content with having all the talking to themselves on Sundays, but must needs try to shut their neighbors' mouths for the rest of the week into the bargain, that poor Mr. Warde, the meekest and most inoffensive of men, would probably have apologized and withdrawn his motion, had he not been unexpectedly seconded by Mr.

Pender. Mr. Pender happened at that time to be in the thick of one of his periodical feuds with his old friend the Admiral, and when he rose slowly to his feet, significant smiles and nudgings of the elbow were exchanged among the ranks of the cowed opposition. He said he would name no names, and it would be his endeavor to avoid giving offense even to certain rather over-susceptible individuals; but he did think the line ought to be drawn at *shouting*. Doubtless there were infirmities which in the course of time and nature might fall upon any one of us; but he would suggest that ear-trumpets were to be purchased at a comparatively trifling outlay. For his own part, he pleaded guilty to the infirmity of weak nerves. For years he had silently borne the excruciating creaking of a certain gallant gentleman's boots. That was not conversation, and he was not entitled to complain of it. For years he had put up with the same gallant gentleman's exasperating habit of blowing his nose at frequent intervals in such a manner as to shake the house to its foundations. The gallant gentleman might play "God save the Queen" on his nose, if he pleased—indeed, he (Mr. Pender) had often fancied that he was trying to do so,—still that would not be conversation. But when, added to all this, the gallant gentleman took to bawling and cursing—

Here the Admiral, in a stentorian voice, said he had not come there to listen to pot-house personalities. The orator retaliated; other members joined in the fray; hot words passed; finally, the committee resigned *en masse;* and for a time it really looked as if all order and authority had come to an end, and anarchy was staring us in the face.

At length, however, a peace-maker, whom modesty forbids the present chronicler to specify, stepped in, and proposed a compromise. On the opposite side of the passage to the reading-room, there was a room which had hitherto been used for no especial purpose, which was seldom entered, and which in truth was but half-furnished. The suggestion that, with the aid of the surplus funds in the hands of the treasurer, this apartment might be transformed into a cheerful meeting-place for those who liked to smoke a pipe over their leading articles, and to exchange a few remarks between the whiffs of it, was fortunate enough to meet with universal acceptance. Harmony was restored; the committee withdrew their resignation; we all shook hands upon it; and from that day forth the morning-room of the club became the favorite haunt of the Beachborough magnates.

In the forenoons, when officers had arduous military duties to attend to, and other young men were engaged in such out-

door pursuits as their several tastes and the season of the year inclined them to, the veterans had it all their own way there. Between eleven o'clock and mid-day they would drop in, one by one, and, after fidgeting about a little, and glancing at the papers which lay upon the table (I fancy they had read their *Times* at home, and did not come to the club to hear news of the outer world), would gravitate towards the bay-window, where they would stand in a group, telling the old tales, chuckling over the old jokes, and retailing the old local chit-chat season after season, and year after year. Outside, perhaps, the sun was shining down upon the far-stretching expanse of blue sea, the children were playing upon the beach, the gulls were poising themselves and swooping this way and that, like flashes of light against the sky; or perhaps a roaring sou'wester was driving great green breakers against the revetment, and sending showers of spray high above the very roofs of the houses; but the old fellows heeded these sights no more. If their dimmed eyes wandered at all from one another's faces, it was only to scan some passer-by on the pavement; their dulled hearing was strained to catch no sweeter sound than some whispered scandal; their whole lives were contracted into an ever-narrowing passage, at the end of which Death stood quietly waiting, and snatched one of the little *coterie* every now and again. From such an old age as this *Domine libera nos!* I declare that, of all the sad sights in this sad world, there are few to me more pathetic than that of a knot of old fogies in a club window. Mayhap they have done good service in their day. They have fought their country's battles by sea and land; they have had their share of honon and fame; at home, in the faded leather case, they keep medals and crosses earned in campaigns which the world has forgotten—nay, which they themselves have half-forgotten too; and now they have got to kill Time as best they may, till Time mercifully takes his turn of the game and kills them. They have not many resources, poor old souls! They don't care much for reading; they are apt to be terribly prosy after dinner; they lose their old tempers somewhat easily over their whist; young men and boys make fun of them;—perhaps it is not very surprising that they should take so profound an interest in trifles and discourse so lengthily upon matters which are no business of theirs. Hear a sample of their conversation, as they stand on the accustomed strip of carpet, which has been worn threadbare by the Admiral's creaking shoes, while the June sunshine streams through the open windows, and the waves rise and fall upon the shingle with a sleepy under-current of sound. It is deaf General Blair who is speaking.

"This man Gervis is a devil of a fellow," says he, in those slow, drawling accents which I know so well. "I don't know what people down here mean to do about calling on him, but I understand that they won't let him into a single respectable house in Paris—won't have him at any price. Married two heiresses; poisoned one, got a separation from t'other, and holds on to the money. Clever rascal, too, I believe. They were devilish sorry to lose him in the diplomatic service. Stuck to him as long as they could, but what with one thing and another, it really wouldn't do, you know, and they had to give him a hint to go. I heard the whole story, the other day, at the Senior from Allonby—you know Colonel Allonby, Admiral."

"Allonby is as blatant an ass as ever brayed," growls the Admiral, who looks with suspicion upon all hearsay information, save such as is imparted by himself.

"Just so—Allonby, who commanded the third battalion of the Rifle Brigade," pursues the deaf narrator serenely. "Allonby is a man who goes a good deal into society and knows everybody, and I thought it would be as well just to ask him what he had heard of this man before I decided on leaving a card at Southlands."

"From what I have been told," observes Major Davis (half-pay, late Bengal Staff-corps), "I doubt whether he would have returned your visit, if you had. As far as I can make out, the man's as mad as a March hare. Barton, the town-clerk, was over in Paris last week, and he found out his address, and took the trouble to call upon him half a dozen times, hoping to have a friendly talk with him about that right-of-way question that there was so much bother with in the old man's time; but he never got farther than the door, nor received a card in return. At last, after he had written, begging for an appointment, he saw the son—the young fellow who is here now—who told him it wasn't the least use his coming again, for he was quite certain his father wouldn't talk business with him or anybody else. And then, when Barton asked whether Mr. Gervis intended living at Southlands, he muttered something about getting the doctor's leave first. Looks queer, doesn't it? There is madness in the family, you know."

"Not at all. Oh dear no! Nothing of the kind. Pooh, pooh!" This series of staccato rejoinders proceeds from the Admiral.

"Well, I only state what I believe to be the case," says Major Davis, slightly offended. "I consider the Gervises to be a decidedly crazy family. In my opinion, the late man was a madman."

"In my opinion," retorts the irrepressible Admiral, "he was as sane as you are—saner. The fact of the matter is that nobody knows anything of his brother, except that there must be something shady about him. Else, why should he never come to England?"

Mr. Pender, who has listened to the foregoing conversation with a faint, superior smile, here observes that he has heard something upon tolerably good authority about the new owner of Southlands, but does not care to talk about it.

"No, Major Davis, if you will excuse me, I should prefer to hold my tongue. You will soon find it out for yourselves, and I never break through my rule of keeping silence when the character of my neighbors is under discussion. Besides, I should only be contradicted, if I did speak."

"I don't know who's going to contradict you here. What d'ye mean?" asks the Admiral, fiercely.

"Oh, nothing," answers Mr. Pender, still smiling pleasantly. "Did you read Gladstone's speech at Greenwich yesterday, Admiral?"

"No, I didn't. I never read Gladstone's speeches, and never will," replies the Admiral, snappishly. "If there is a thing I can't stand, it's a man who won't say what he means," he adds presently, alluding, no doubt, to some one not so far away as the liberal statesman.

General Blair is quite of the Admiral's way of thinking, and so is Major Davis.

"Upon my soul, I don't see the necessity for so much caution, Mr. Pender," remarks the latter. "It's rather a poor compliment to us I must say. After all, we aren't a pack of old women, to go babbling about all we hear, are we?"

"Out with it, Pender—out with it! You know you're dying to tell," chimes in the General, with a senile chuckle.

Thus urged, Mr. Pender consents to communicate his intelligence. Glancing first over his right shoulder, then over his left, he draws a step closer to the eager warrior, whose hand is raised expectantly to his ear. "The truth is—" he begins, in a low, impressive voice. And then he lifts his closed hand to his lips, elevates his little finger, and throws back his head.

"Oh, that's it, is it?"

"God bless my soul, you don't say so! Well, I half suspected as much myself."

"Ah, the old story! His father was just the same you know."

Mr. Pender has bottled up his dose of calumny as he does his trumps at whist, and now reaps the reward of self-re-

straint in the shape of a general acceptance of his theory. At first some feeling of disappointment was apparent that matters were no worse; but when Major Davis had good-naturedly pointed out that the fact of a man's being a drunkard by no means excludes the possibility of his having killed one wife, ill-treated another, and appropriated the fortunes of both, but is rather, so to speak, presumptive evidence in favor of his having done so, the cronies cheered up again, and presently trotted off to their respective homes to luncheon, having agreed that they would certainly call at Southlands so soon as the arrival of its iniquitous tenant should be announced.

"As there will be no lady in the house," remarked Mr. Pender, in conclusion, "I shall, of course, not take Mrs. Pender with me; and I should not feel myself justified in holding aloof from a neighbor because he unfortunately gives way to intemperance."

"Dash it all! what do I care whether a man drinks or not? I shall go because I want to have a look at the beggar," says the Admiral, more honestly.

Shall I confess that there was another person present who felt a similar curiosity? We all have our weaknesses; and I am given to understand that one of mine is an exaggerated interest in the ways and manners of persons with whom I am not called upon by any duty to associate. Being an unoccupied man, and in need of a hobby of some kind, I have found one for myself in the observation of my fellow-mortals; and a really original human being is as delightful a find to me as an original picture by Botticelli would be to another kind of dilettante. Not on account of his supposed misdeeds (for sinners, as we know, can scarcely be considered rarities in the race to which we have the honor to belong) was I so anxious to make Mr. Gervis's acquaintance, but because certain casual remarks, dropped in my presence, by his son, had led me to imagine him a man such as one does not meet with every day.

Circumstances had thrown me a good deal into the society of Claud during the first days of his sojourn in his new home. The young fellow wanted somebody to consult with and to assist him in making preparations for his father's arrival; and as he could not see much of Freddy Croft, who, between drill and Miss Lambert, had little time to spare, I suppose he made a friend of me in default of a better.

I believe I was of some little use to him in small matters where he had no personal experience to guide him—such as, for instance, in conciliating the old servants of the late Colonel Gervis, and in inducing them to co-operate in the rearrangement of furniture, and so forth: at all events, he was pleased

to say that he considered himself greatly indebted to me. The time was too short to allow of our carrying out all Claud's designs, but between us we managed to furbish up the old house and give it an inhabited look, and on that morning when I played the eavesdropper at the club, I was on my way to luncheon at Southlands, where some few details still required notice, and where I was to have the pleasure of meeting Mrs. Lambert and her daughter—those ladies having signified through Freddy Croft that they were still languishing to behold the park and garden which had so long been closed against all intruders.

I dare say love of the picturesque did not enter for much into Mrs. Lambert's desire to visit Southlands; but, as a fact, the pleasure-grounds of that moderate-sized domain far surpass in beauty any of those belonging to the more pretentious mansions of the county. The late owner of the place had, it seems, a passion for landscape gardening; and I don't know where he could have found a property better adapted by nature for the gratification of his tastes. Sometimes, in the old man's time, a party of Cockney excursionists (for Beachborough is but a hundred miles or so from London, and well within reach of 'Arry and his sweet friends) would apply at the lodge for permission to take a stroll through the gardens, receiving in answer a prompt assurance that their request could not be entertained for a moment. Against them, as against their betters, the iron gates remained resolutely shut; but when, following the instincts of their race, they went out sailing in the bay towards evening, they could, if it so pleased them, enjoy a distant view of what has always seemed to me one of the most pleasantly situated country houses in England.

The long and somewhat monotonous line of chalk cliffs, topped by bare downs, which forms nine-tenths of the coast scenery of Lynshire, takes at Beachborough a sudden inward sweep, and immediately to the westward of the town a deep, well-wooded valley, narrowing into a mere ravine towards its head, cuts for some two miles into the country. The eye, weary and dazzled with gazing at white cliffs, white houses, and a sea and sky which, on the hottest days, are often also of a whitish hue, turns gratefully towards those dark, cool woods, and, following them upwards, rests presently upon a low, irregular house, built of gray stone, and standing with its back against the hillside. Even from that distance the terraces, the shrubberies, and the bright patches of flower-beds that lie about it can be distinguished, and jaded holiday-makers, as they look, may indulge their imagination in picturing to themselves what a pleasant dream life must be to the idle and rich folks who

dwell amid such enchanted bowers. There is a park, too, one notices, sloping downwards in the direction of the town in a succession of grassy undulations; but it has not much to boast of in the way of timber, and such trees as there are are stunted and blown landwards by the winter gales which sweep up the valley and have it all their own way on its eastern and more exposed flank. The house, facing a point or two west of south, is sheltered from these by a shoulder of the hill and by a belt of fir-trees; and behind it are more trees, growing gradually thinner and smaller, till the valley loses itself among corn-fields, which, in their turn, give place to the gorse and heather of the moors.

Viewed from the sea, whence alone it can be seen as a whole, the landscape hereabouts is a brilliant mass of varied colors; for even when the yellow blossoms have fallen from the gorse, there are mustard-fields here and there, besides clover and sainfoin and the purple bloom of the heather that crowns all. A glittering thread shows itself in places between the trees. It is the stream, which, as one would expect from the lie of the land, finds its way along the bottom of the ravine towards the shore—a tiny streamlet, yet deep enough to harbor trout in its innumerable pools. If you were near enough to it, you would perceive that a pathway follows its course, crossing and re-crossing it by means of frequent rustic bridges, and leading past the house to the open country beyond.

Now this foot-path, which makes a pleasant short cut from Beachborough to Southlands, is likewise the shortest way, by a good two miles, to Northbourne, West Somerley, and several other inland villages which can only otherwise be reached from the town by walking along the Lynchester high-road and turning abruptly to the left at the point where the Southlands park palings cease. Whether the public ever enjoyed a right of way through those shady woodlands I will not take upon me to determine: it is certain that no one was ever allowed to exercise it by old Colonel Gervis; and as the lawsuit with which he was so frequently threatened was never actually brought against him, I am inclined to think that, as regarded this particular count in his quarrel with the world, he must have had right on his side. Be that as it may, the shady short cut had been a great convenience to me in my daily visits to Southlands; and on the morning already alluded to I turned my steps in the accustomed direction, thinking to myself with some inward satisfaction, as I went, that Mrs. Lambert and her daughter could hardly be aware of its existence, and were probably at that very moment toiling wearily up the dusty hill in a fly.

This fond illusion was abruptly dispelled before I had advanced a hundred yards into the wood. Suddenly, above the liquid notes of the thrushes overhead, the continuous sleepy murmur of the insects in mid-air and the babbling of the stream at my feet, arose the jarring accents of a too familiar human voice, and simultaneously there appeared, from a bench behind a tree, an ample human form, expensively clad.

"Oh, you bad man!" cries Mrs. Lambert, shaking her parasol at me with charming playfulness; "so you knew of this delightful walk all along, and never told us about it! I believe the truth was you did not want our company."

Have I mentioned that Mrs. Lambert, on becoming aware of my entire respectability, had assumed a demeanor of the most flattering friendliness towards me—so much so, indeed, that I had latterly wondered more than once, with some anxiety, whether Mr. Lambert had as yet gone to his long home?

"Katie and Fred—and Sir Frederick have gone on," she resumed. "I sat down to rest for a few minutes and to enjoy this lovely prospect. Don't you love sitting in the woods in summer, Mr. Knowles?"

"Yes; but by the time you get to the house, you'll find the gnats have been feeding upon your wrists and ankles," I replied. "At least, I sincerely trust they have," I added *in petto*. After which we resumed our upward way, side by side, chatting amicably. I am sorry to say that I have not my grandmother's gift of snubbing disagreeable people, and can never, for the life of me, help being civil to a bore. It is a humiliating thought that, if there were no easy-going listeners like myself, the race of bores would probably ere long become extinct.

At the point where the path touches the boundary of the garden, we came upon Freddy Croft assisting Miss Lambert to fasten one of the buttons of her glove; and I perceived, from the manner in which the young lady rolled her eyes and then cast them down, that she was trying hard to blush. "Is it possible," I thought, "that Freddy can be such an ass as to—But no, it is *not* possible. In one respect, at least, the youths of the present day are more wide awake than their elders used to be; and surely in vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird! Nevertheless it is a risky game to flutter too close to the meshes. I wonder, now, whether a word in season from an old friend would be taken amiss."

While I was thus communing with my heart, we were advancing slowly across a sunny lawn all ablaze with beds of scarlet geraniums and calceolarias and verbenas, and presently emerging from behind a clump of rhododendrons, found our-

selves face to face with Claud Gervis, upon whose arm an elderly stranger was leaning.

"How do you do, Mrs. Lambert? How do you do, Croft?" said the young man, shaking hands with his guests. "Let me introduce my father, who arrived unexpectedly this morning."

The stranger took off his hat, holding it in his hand, without that hurry to replace it which an Englishman usually displays, while he bowed to each of us in turn. He was a man of something less than middle height, who stooped a good deal and carried himself with the fatigued air of an invalid. His hands and feet were the tiniest I had ever seen upon a male creature. His waxed mustache was black, as was also his hair; but it seemed probable that both owed something to the appliances of art. After scrutinizing his features in search of any expression of character which might be revealed from beneath those drooped eyelids or about the lines surrounding the mouth, I gave up the attempt, on discovering that there was absolutely no expression there at all. His face was a colorless waxen mask, which, if it had any secrets to tell, apparently did not impart them to casual seekers. Upon the whole, my impression of him resolved itself into three conclusions; firstly, that he was a gentleman; secondly, that in appearance and breeding he was a Frenchman; and thirdly, that he was either much older than he looked or looked much older than he was.

When he began to speak, it was in a rather peculiar, but not unpleasant voice—low and languid, but as clear as a bell. "I think myself very fortunate to have arrived in time to welcome these ladies. I should not myself have ventured to have invited them into our rough bachelor quarters; but Claud has always had the advantage of me in audacity. I am sure Miss Lambert understands that a father is not to blame for attractions which may well make his son a trifle indiscreet, and I hope Mrs. Lambert will remember that neither of us is responsible for the cook."

When Mr. Gervis had concluded this somewhat equivocal greeting, he almost closed his eyes, surveying us, with his head laid a little on one side, after the fashion of an elderly jackdaw; and a pause supervened, during which I think we were all wishing ourselves away.

Perhaps Mrs. Lambert had a dim impression that she was being indirectly accused of gluttony, for she broke the silence by observing that she scarcely ever touched anything in the middle of the day. "I wish one could live without eating at all. Don't you, Mr. Gervis?"

Mr. Gervis said, Certainly not. He should be very fond of

eating, only he could never get nice things to eat, somehow. And so the conversation became general; and in due course we reached the house, where I observed that Mrs. Lambert did full justice to the delicacies set before her.

The unexpected addition to our party was felt as something of a restraint by all of us, except Freddy Croft, who never was known to exhibit signs of shyness in his life, and whose tongue was employed no less actively than his knife and fork.

"What a jolly old house this is! Just the sort of place I should like to live in. Big enough to hold as many people as one would ever care to have staying with one, you know, and yet not so big as to make one think about hanging one's self, if one was left alone for a few days. Stands well, too: I do like a house with a view. The only thing is, you do want a bit of level ground somewhere, don't you? I suppose there isn't a single place in the park where you could possibly pitch a wicket. But that don't matter so much for you, Gervis; you never used to dry-bob at Eton, did you?"

"Very seldom," answered Claud, a little regretfully. "I wish I had now. There are so few rivers in England; and of course one can get cricket almost everywhere. I can play after a fashion: not well enough to be allowed to figure in any of your county matches though, I'm afraid."

The lad had already confided to me his ambition to excel in all the sports which find favor in the eyes of English gentlemen, and that his great dread was that his neighbors might set him down as a muff.

"My dear fellow," answered Freddy, reassuringly, "you don't know what a lot of duffers we are down here. *You'll* do fast enough. As for the Lynshire eleven, it was simply a by-word till I took it up, three years ago; and even now, taking our performance as a whole, I should say we turn out about the worst team in England. I make the fellows practice, though—that's one thing. You see *I* have plenty of level ground—only too much of it! By the by, Miss Lambert, you have never seen my ancestral abode, have you? I flatter myself that, in point of sheer, uncompromising hideousness, it hasn't a rival in Europe. You really ought to come over and have a look at it some day, you know."

"We have not been asked yet," observed Mrs. Lambert, smiling archly, and displaying as fine a set of teeth as can be bought for money.

A queer look came into Freddy's face for a moment. Indeed, it was not very likely that Mrs. Lambert would be invited to enter Croft Manor so long as his mother presided over that establishment.

"Oh, well there's nobody there now, don't you know," he replied, shirking the question adroitly. "Later on, my people will be coming down for the summer, and then we shall make you stand up and be bowled at, Gervis. You are going to stop here for good now, of course."

"Well, I hope so. I don't quite know yet."

"Oh, you must. The continent's all very well for a time; but England's the country to live in, isn't it, Mrs. Lambert?"

"Oh, the *only* country," acquiesced that lady. "The English people who regularly reside abroad are such a very odd lot."

Her daughter made a grimace. Possibly she may have been shrewd enough to have discovered that; if there was one thing obnoxious to her easy-going admirer, it was humbug. "We lived abroad ourselves for ever so many years, as I was telling you the other day," she remarked; "and I must say I enjoyed it immensely."

"Ah, yes; but then you're a lady, which makes all the difference," said Freddy. "What is a man to do with himself all day abroad? I mean an ignorant beggar like myself, who don't pretend to care much about churches and pictures and all that."

"Some people do like churches and pictures," Claud observed.

"You do, I dare say; but most fellows don't; they only make believe. No; what I think is, foreign countries are very useful to run over to once a year—say in April. I can do very well with a week of Paris and a fortnight of Nice and Monaco about that time; but I don't want any more. Then there's one's wedding-trip. I suppose I shall have to spend a month at the Italian lakes, or some other beastly hole, then."

"I am sure that, when that time comes, you will be allowed to please yourself, Sir Frederick," said Mrs. Lambert, with much amiability.

"Nobody is ever allowed to please himself again after he is married," replied the young man, sententiously. Whereat Claud laughed, and Miss Lambert said—

"Of course not. Why should men think they have a right to be selfish all their lives?"

"Katie, my dear!" exclaimed the elder and more foolish lady, "you must not say such things. It is a wife's bounden duty to consult her husband's wishes before her own."

"Ah, Miss Lambert," sighed Freddy, "if you will only bear that in mind, what a happy life yours may be!"

"She will, Sir Frederick; depend upon it, she will," cried the fond mother. "I know her better than to believe all the nonsense she talks. She may say what she pleases; but if ever there was an unselfish girl," etc., etc. So the old farce went

on—the old farce that has been played so many times, and strange to say, with such frequent success.

Mr. Gervis, all this time, had remained perfectly silent and impassive. Whether he was listening or not it was impossible to say. Once I saw him cock his head on one side, and look at Mrs. Lambert consideringly; after which he shifted it over to the other, and took a brief survey of Freddy Croft; but this, so far as I could observe, was the sole symptom of life that he manifested for the best part of an hour, during which time he leaned back in his chair, neither eating nor drinking, nor moving a feature—the picture of blank weariness.

He did not offer to accompany us when we passed through the open French windows of the dining-room, and set out to inspect the gardens and shrubberies at our leisure. Probably he was aware that we should be more at our ease without him, and doubtless he, on his side, was likely to be a shade less bored in his own company than in ours. We duly visited the conservatories, Claud leading the way and doing his duty as showman very creditably; we said what was proper to the head-gardener, who directed our attention to his rare exotics; we wandered up the winding gravel path and among the clumps of rhododendrons and azaleas which clothe the slopes behind the house; and then one of the party, whose temperament inclines him towards indolence on summer afternoons, lagged behind, till, taking advantage of a friendly thicket, he slipped aside unnoticed, and laid him down upon a grassy bank to rest.

It was a pleasant place that I had chosen, under the shade of a tall magnolia. Far beneath me stretched the sea, upon whose glassy surface a few fishing-boats lay becalmed; a hanging haze of smoke to the left showed the position of the town, and from it woodlands trended gently upwards to meet the lawns and terraces and parterres upon which the man who was dead had spent so much time and money. As I lay there, enjoying my cigar, I could fancy I saw him pottering about hither and thither among the workmen, criticising this, condemning that, quarreling with his gardener, perhaps asking himself inwardly, what, when all was said and done, was the good of it all—a grim, lonely old figure. "Where is he now?" I wonder, clasping my hands behind my head, and staring up at the cloudless sky. "Would he be vexed if he could see the strangers making free with the sacred inclosures which were his once and will never be his again throughout eternity? We go hence, and are forgotten; but do we forget? Do all earthly treasures and interests and ambitions become as the merest dross in our eyes the moment that we escape

from the prison of this body?" Every one will understand the profound train of thought into which such speculations as these were likely to lead, and not a few will perceive the probable result thereof, when supplemented by warm weather and tobacco.

When I opened my eyes again the shadows were long and black upon the grass, and Claud Gervis, with his hands in his pockets, was standing before me and laughing.

"Dear me!" said I, sitting up and rubbing my eyes, "I believe I have been asleep."

"I believe you have," answered my young friend. "Do you know that it is getting on for six o'clock?"

"You don't say so! What have you done with the ladies?"

"You will be sorry to hear that they have been obliged to go away without bidding you good-by. Croft drove them down the hill in his mail-phaeton a quarter of an hour ago. I was to apologize to you and to my father, whom also we failed to discover. We looked for him in every room, except the one where I knew he was sure to be—which may account for it. Are you inclined to walk down to the town? If you are, I will go with you; only I must just see the governor first, and tell him he can come out without danger of encountering any more strange ladies."

We found Mr. Gervis in the library, reading a book, which he laid aside upon our entrance, and which I afterwards had the curiosity to glance at, and found to be a well-worn copy of Montaigne.

"The coast is clear, governor," said Claud. "Mrs. Lambert sends you all sorts of polite messages, and is inconsolable at not having shaken hands with you before she left."

"I don't know," observed Mr. Gervis, addressing me in his tired, deliberate voice, "whether the term 'governor' is considered quite the proper thing in this country. In my time we used to say 'sir,' which is perhaps slightly ridiculous. 'Papa' is equally objectionable in another way, and 'father' has always struck me as having a certain plebeian ring. When one man is constantly speaking to another, he has to call him something; and we hit upon 'governor' as, upon the whole, meeting the requirements of the case. The French people thought it sounded very fitting and respectful; but I am not sure whether it will quite do here. I have lived so long out of England that I am obliged to ask how I ought to behave."

I said I thought that, in these days, parents and children need not consult any one's convenience but their own as regarded their mutual relations; and he assured me that I relieved him exceedingly.

"So they are gone—your friends?" he remarked to his son. "Is Mrs. Lambert a native of Beachborough?"

"No; only a visitor, I believe."

"She is a most impossible person. Does young Croft intend to marry the daughter?"

"I should hope not," answered Claud, laughing; "but you had better ask Mr. Knowles. He knows more about it than I do."

Mr. Gervis's interest in the matter was, however, not very keen, it appeared; for he forbore to question me, and sat silent for a time, absently drumming upon the table with his little white fingers. At length he resumed:

"I feel that I ought to beg everybody's pardon for appearing on the scene in that abrupt way, and spoiling the luncheon-party: nothing is more inconsiderate than taking people by surprise. But really the fault was my valet's, not mine. I leave all details of that kind to him, Mr. Knowles, just as I leave the management of my household to Claud; and I assure you that between them, they lead me a deuce of a life. Apropos, Claud, have you any news from Paris?"

"I had a letter this morning," answered the young man, looking at his father a little apprehensively, I thought. "Varinka and Gen talk of being here the day after to-morrow. You won't go away, will you?"

"My dear fellow, what a question! You forget that we are in England, and that we belong to the smaller class of landed gentry. Having accepted the situation, we can but endeavor to show ourselves equal to it; and so long as the Princess chooses to honor me with her company, I shall remain at my post. I imagine, however, that a fortnight of Southlands will be the outside that she will be able to accomplish."

"That remains to be seen," answered Claud, cheerfully. "At all events, we will hope for the best."

"Well—yes; we will hope for that," said Mr. Gervis. And I gathered from his tone that his notion of what was best might perhaps not be identical with his son's.

Soon afterwards Claud and I started for Beachborough; and, as we walked down through the wood, my companion confided to me that his father and step-mother were not upon the best of terms, and that he was very anxious to effect a reconciliation between them. "There is no actual quarrel," he explained; "only a sort of misunderstanding. They are both good people, but they are both peculiar; and they do not understand one another—that is all."

"Oh, that is all, is it?" said I, liking the lad none the less for his innocent self-confidence. Quarrels are made up every

day; but there is only one cure that ever I heard of for a chronic misunderstanding; and that is death. I did not, however, give utterance to this discouraging sentiment; and the would-be peace-maker proceeded to treat of his designs in a very sanguine strain until we reached the harbor, where he went on board the *Siren*, and we parted.

CHAPTER IV.

PROVINCIALITIES.

"WELL, and if he *has* quarreled with his wife—what then?" said my grandmother, peering at me over her spectacles. "Many a wise man has done that before now, and many a fool has suffered for not doing it. Ahab, for instance. If he had had the strength of mind to quarrel with Jezebel, he might have ruled his people as well as most kings, and died in his bed like a decent man. Samson, again. A pretty pass he brought himself to by making it up with Delilah after she had betrayed him once!"

"Oh, certainly," I agreed, "and if you come to that, we are all in our present lamentable predicament by reason of the uxoriousness of Adam. I am not for one moment standing up for wives as a class—indeed, if I possessed one, it is more than probable that I should quarrel with her myself,—only I thought I had better warn you that Mr. Gervis and his princess don't exactly hit it off, because you are generally so very severe upon unfortunates who fail in their matrimonial duties."

In point of fact, Mrs. Knowles has made herself somewhat notorious in her native county by the sternness of her demeanor towards certain semi-estranged couples; and although I had not thought fit to dispute her assertion that our new neighbor was the most original and amusing man she had met for years, it did seem to me that, in view of future possible contingencies, it might be well to remind her that his domestic relations left something to be desired.

"There is no rule without an exception," she answered calmly. "And I never listen to gossip, as you know."

"Gossip!—why, I had it from the man's own son. To think that a fine, clear sense of justice should allow itself to be so obscured by the mere empty compliment of a morning call!"

"Empty fiddlestick! Surely there is nothing very surprising in one of my oldest friends coming to see me, and making himself agreeable. From what you say, I imagine that he didn't exert himself to talk to you the other day, and therefore you

don't like him. Don't you be so fond of judging your neighbors, Tom; but turn your attention nearer home, and it will be the better for you some day. Now, as you have paid me the unusual 'empty compliment' of being in at this hour of the evening, you may ring the bell for prayers."

And so, presently, the thirteenth chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians is read out in a clear, ringing voice, and somewhat pointed emphasis gives me to understand that I am no better than sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal.

But although Mr. Gervis was thus early taken into favor by one influential inhabitant of Beachborough, the rest of his neighbors, whether in the town or the surrounding country, eyed him askance, and seemed in no great hurry to cultivate his acquaintance. A vague yet general impression that the man was under a cloud caused these wary provincials to hold aloof, at the outset, no one choosing to be the first to hold out the right hand of fellowship to one of whose antecedents so little definite was known. They encircled him, as it were, each with a visiting-card in one hand and a brickbat in the other, waiting for further information before deciding which of these forms of welcome should be launched at the intruder.

This truly British attitude exhibited itself with amusing distinctness on the evening of the much-talked-of yeomanry ball, at which, to the great surprise of the assembled company, Mr. Gervis saw fit to appear. When Claud Gervis entered, followed by his father, I happened to be standing beside the Admiral, who must, I suppose, have received an invitation at the last moment; and as that gallant officer has an inveterate habit of thinking aloud, I was enabled to follow the course of his reflections, which may be taken as fairly representing those of his friends.

"Cool, I must say—devilish cool! Wonder who asked him here? Oh, young Croft, eh?—there he is, shaking hands with him. Hah! don't think much of that; young Croft would know anybody. Introducing him to his mother, though, I see. Well, of course, if Lady Croft takes him up—Hullo! that was rather a stiff bow. Fellow's a regular adventurer, I suspect,—looks like it, anyhow. God bless my soul! there's Lord Lynchester going up to speak to him. Wonder what they're laughing at—dare say he's an amusing sort of scoundrel, you know, eh? Upon my word I have a great mind to—No, dash it all! no; it wouldn't do. All very well for those grandees—it don't matter to them; but a family man, living in the place, eh? No, no—wait a bit; wait a bit."

While the Admiral took counsel with himself in this strain, Mr. Gervis, whose interlocutor had now left him, strolled slowly

back towards the door, and, espying there an unoccupied arm-chair, dropped into it, and, crossing his legs comfortably, gave himself up to a leisurely study of the natives, most of whom, as he was perhaps aware, were returning the compliment with interest.

Sitting there, conspicuously apart, every inch of his person, from his pale, changeless face to his black silk stockings and his little shiny shoes, could be seen from the farthest part of the long room; and if all eyes had not already been turned in his direction, they would have become so a few minutes later, when the august forms of Lord and Lady Courtney were seen looming in the doorway, close to his elbow.

Lord Courtney, the lord-lieutenant of Lynshire, is a nobleman in whom we all feel a legitimate pride. He is not over and above civil to us, it is true, and behind his back we may sometimes affect to laugh at his high and mighty ways, calling him Old Pomposity, and other irreverent names; but for all that, and despite the fact that his features are of the homeliest, and that (as my grandmother often says) he has "about as much brains in his head as would lie upon a shilling," we can't but acknowledge the reflected luster shed upon us by his magnificent presence. I have stared at most of the emperors and kings of the world; but never a one amongst them have I beheld who could compare with our lord-lieutenant in sublimity of carriage, or who appeared to have a tithe of his conscious grandeur. When Lord Courtney takes his walks abroad, he holds his head so high that the brim of his hat almost rests upon his nose, which indeed is slightly upturned, as if to support it; a smile, half benign, half tolerant, usually plays about the corners of his mouth; he moves with a slow, dignified step, which is almost, but not quite, a strut. One has heard many people accused of offering two fingers of their left hand to their acquaintances; but Lord Courtney is the only man I know who habitually practices this form of greeting. And as it is an established axiom that we must set a high value upon ourselves if we would be thought highly of by the world, it is perhaps not surprising that his lordship should occupy the exalted position that he does in English society, and that a nod from him should be more prized in Beachborough than half an hour of Lord Lynchester's racy talk.

When, therefore, this majestic creature, instead of advancing serenely into the ball-room, looking straight before him, as is his wont, halted before the little old man in the arm-chair, and, holding out his entire right hand, said, in a cordial voice, "How are you, Gervis? how are you? Glad to see you. Didn't know you were in these parts"—when, I say, so un-

expected a voucher of respectability as this was conferred upon the mysterious stranger, what could Beachborough do but throw itself metaphorically at his feet?

As weird, unreal shapes, born of darkness, vanish at the rising of the sun, even so the shades of suspicion and calumny which had hung about our poor friend were dispersed by the first beams of Lord Courtney's noble countenance; and in less time than it has taken to describe the entrance of that luminary, Mr. Gervis's character had been established upon a basis above the reach of vulgar detraction. Drink?—was ever so absurd a charge brought against an obviously abstemious invalid! Insanity?—why, the man's wit and talents had earned him a reputation in every European capital! Cruelty, indeed!—what next? But there!—everybody knows that there is no scandal too foolish to obtain credence in this ill-natured world; and is it not morally certain that if the angel Gabriel himself were to visit us in disguise, such fellows as Blair and Pender would immediately pretend to know of something to his disadvantage? The Admiral, for his part, was glad to say that he had never believed a single syllable of the rubbish that had been whispered to him; and he lost no time in shaking hands with the new-comer in his bluff, sailor-like way, and assuring him of the pleasure with which he would put down his name for the club. Kind-hearted, muddle-headed Lady Croft, having a dim impression that she had been rather rude to the man who looked like a foreigner, came sailing across the room towards him presently to make amends.

"Lord Courtney tells me he saw a great deal of you in Paris. I did not know who you were at first," she began, in the nervous, plaintive accents which are habitual with her. "Freddy introduces all sorts of people to me—one never can tell—I beg your pardon, I'm sure. Is Mrs. Gervis—I mean the Princess er—er—I am *so* stupid about names—Ouranoff, thank you—is she here to-night? No? Only arrived this afternoon? Oh, then of course she would be much too tired; and besides, I don't know why anybody should come into such a rabble, unless there were a necessity for it. I shall hope to have the pleasure of calling upon her soon. How hot it is here, is it not? And how these people push one about! *Would* you mind taking me into the next room to have a cup of tea?"

Few persons, I should imagine, can ever have been left ten minutes alone with Lady Croft without having been put in possession of full details with regard to that much-tried lady's most recent family trouble. The troubles of the Crofts, real or imaginary, have occupied her whole mind for so many years that she is now scarcely able to talk connectedly upon any other

subject; and there is a *naïveté* in her innocent conviction that what interests her must interest the rest of the world which goes far towards securing for her the sympathy she claims. Mr. Gervis was hardly the sort of man whom an ordinary individual would have felt drawn to make a confidant of; but long before Lady Croft had finished her cup of tea, he had heard all about her perplexities and worries—of the escapades of her daughter, who had taken up with a very fast and slangy set, and was getting herself talked about from one end of the county to the other,—of the importunities of a certain ne'er-do-well brother-in-law, who, it appeared, was perpetually clamoring for money to pay his racing debts,—and last, not least, of the alarming behavior of Freddy with reference to that terrible Miss Lambert.

"He will marry her, Mr. Gervis; I feel convinced that he will; and I shall simply die of vexation. It is curious that I should have had a presentiment, the very first day we came down here, when I saw Freddy walking on the Esplanade with that odious girl, that some horrible calamity would fall upon us through her. And I am absolutely helpless; that is the worst of it. Freddy is, of course, his own master, and he would no more think of consulting me before taking a wife than he would of asking my opinion about a horse or a gun. And yet it stands to reason that I must be able to judge of girls much better than he can do. A mother devotes her whole life to her children, and, as soon as ever the law sets them free, they turn round and snap their fingers at her. They may commit any fatal folly they please, and she must not say a word. If she does, they quarrel with her perhaps; at the least, they hint that she had better mind her own business. As if their business was not hers! It seems very hard."

"I suppose it does seem hard," observed Mr. Gervis placidly.

"It *is* hard. Men don't in the least realize what women—especially mothers—have to go through."

"I should think it must be horrid," said Mr. Gervis. "It can't be helped, though. If I might venture to offer a word of advice, I should recommend you to make up your mind not to care."

"How is one to help caring?"

"You can educate yourself not to care about anything; and it becomes surprisingly easy as one grows older. The truth is, that very few things are really of the slightest consequence. I dare say your son won't marry that young person with the high color, after all; but if he does, the chances are that you will like her as much as you would anybody else after the first year."

"Mr. Gervis would you allow your son to marry Miss Lambert?"

"Oh dear, no; but then, you see, he has no money except what I give him; so that he is in my power. If it were not for that, I should not attempt to prevent his marrying Miss Lambert, or Mrs. Lambert either, if he chose. It would be useless exertion. As it is, he will very likely have to remain a bachelor until I die; for it would be excessively inconvenient to me to do without him. Here he comes, making himself very agreeable to a particularly pretty young lady. Doubtless another siren of the Lambert tribe."

"Oh no," sighed Lady Croft; "she is a Miss Flemyng—a very nice girl, as girls go. Once I thought that Freddy was rather smitten with her; and I should have been only too *thankful* if he had been, though she has no money and is nobody in particular. But that is just an instance of the crooked way in which things go. Your son, as you say, might flirt as much as he liked with Miss Lambert, and no harm would come of it; so of course he never looks at her; whereas mine, who has nobody to protect him from himself, falls into the trap at once."

"The world is out of joint," answered Mr. Gervis, sententiously. "But it matters very little in the long run, I assure you."

"It matters a great deal to me," returned poor Lady Croft.

I need hardly say that I do not report the above dialogue as having actually reached my ears. In point of fact, at the time of its occurrence, I must have been well on my way towards home and bed. This history is less the result of personal observation than of information received at various times and from divers trustworthy sources; and if, in writing it, I had to confine myself to the relation of such incidents as I could swear to in a court of justice, I should not only be obliged to cut out many scenes of a most interesting and pathetic nature, but some of the characters who will make their appearance in due course would have to be omitted altogether. As for this yeomanry ball, I saw little more of it than did Lord Courtney, whose august countenance was withdrawn from the assembly after a short quarter of an hour. The truth is, that my dancing days are over; and I was able to retire early, with the happy conviction that nobody would notice my absence.

Before midnight the greater part of the ladies and gentlemen present had done likewise; for it is not, or rather used not to be, considered the thing to linger over-long at these entertainments, which are intended rather for the amusement of the men than of their superiors. Lady Lynchester, a thin, washed-out looking person, who had never been heard to laugh in her

life, rose from her seat at the end of the room as soon as her lord signaled to her that she was free to go; and the Beachborough contingent, ever scrupulous in the strict observance of etiquette, hastened to follow her ladyship's lead. Then landowners from distant parts of the country, who had a long drive between themselves and home, collected their respective wives and daughters, and trooped off in a body, the departure of some stragglers, loitering near the doorway in hopes of seeing a little of the fun, being hastened by Lord Lynchester, who began to stalk about, with his hands behind his back, wondering audibly what the deuce those people were sticking there for.

But when the last of these had disappeared, there still remained a few of what the noble and gallant Colonel called "the right sort"—privileged persons, who were known to entertain no objection to a romp and could be relied upon to tell no tales next day. Conspicuous among the latter was Miss Croft, "a downright jolly girl, with no stuck-up nonsense about her"—to use Lord Lynchester's words,—"just like her brother, only more so, you know,"—a description so terse and accurate that no further space need be taken up in introducing her to the reader. Miss Lambert, although an outsider, was included in the circle of choice spirits; probably because she carried her credentials in her face; and there were three or four young ladies besides, whose names it is unnecessary to record.

During the early part of the evening, an unspoken convention had divided the ball-room into two halves, the officers and their friends sitting and dancing at the upper end of it, while the larger and humbler portion of the assemblage disported itself at the lower; but now this imaginary barrier was swept away, together with all irksome class distinctions, and the whole floor was at the disposition of the dancers. Now, when we dance in Lynshire, we do it with a will, not skimming languidly and dreamily over the polished surface, nor lurching heavily round and round on the same spot, like humming-tops tottering to their fall, as the fashion of some effeminate citizens is; but taking a firm grip of our partner's waist and hand, putting down our heads, and starting off at a pace as good as we can make it, helter-skelter, every man for himself, and devil take the hindmost. The consequences of this energetic method, when adopted by some seventy couples in a long and narrow room, may be easily imagined. Before the first waltz was at an end, many a stalwart yeoman had measured his length upon the well-waxed floor, and the elbows of more than one fair maiden were scratched and bruised. Every now and

then a faint shriek rose from the midst of the *mêlée*, or a manly voice was heard to expostulate for a moment; but the predominant sound was that of laughter, and hard knocks seemed to be distributed pretty evenly all round, upon an amicable give-and-take principle. Fat little Wilkins, the butcher, pounding blindly ahead, and sawing the air with outstretched arm, brought his fist down with a thump on the middle of Lord Lynchester's back, and, instead of turning pale and trembling, as he would have done at any other time after such a mishap, bobbed off again as merrily as ever with a "Beg pardon, m' lord. Didn't see yer—haw, haw, haw!" For indeed the supper-room had been open for half an hour, and it is not on every day of the year that a man can drink the best of champagne and pay nothing for it.

"All right, Wilkins!" shouted Lord Lynchester after him; "I'll make it hot for you in a minute."

And presently, sure enough, his lordship, having secured an efficient partner in Miss Croft, darted off in pursuit of the delinquent, and proceeded to waltz round and round him in an ever-contracting circle till he reduced him to such a state of giddiness that he was fain to lean against the wall and gasp. Then, with a deft and rapid thrust in the ribs, which caused the luckless butcher to exclaim aloud, "Oh, Lord!" he returned to his starting-point, and, throwing himself down upon a bench, gave way to a peal of merriment in which Miss Croft joined heartily.

Claud Gervis looked on at all this horse-play with rather wide-opened eyes. Was it in this manner that the aristocracy of Great Britain was accustomed to take its relaxation? he wondered. Of the manners and habits of his native land he was almost entirely ignorant. At Eton he had, of course, associated with many young sprigs of nobility; but rank is not recognized among boys, and Claud's impression of an English lord, which was that commonly current in foreign countries, had received confirmation from such specimens of the race as Lord Courtney and an occasional ambassador or minister plenipotentiary who had come in his way.

"What are you thinking of?" inquired his partner, that pretty Miss Flemyng of whom mention has already been made. "You look quite horrified."

"No; I am not horrified," the young man said; "but I am rather surprised, I admit. It is all so very different from what I expected. I did not think we English were ever so—so uproarious. Surely it is not usual at a ball to try and knock down as many people as one can."

"Well, hardly," answered Miss Flemyng, laughing. "But

this is a yeomanry ball, you must remember; and besides, all the quiet, respectable people are supposed to be gone away."

"But Lady Croft is still here, and Miss Lambert—not to mention present company."

"Lady Croft is here because Florry won't go away; and Miss Lambert is here because she is Miss Lambert, I suppose; and I am here because I came with the Crofts. You need not say anything about it when papa comes to call upon you, by the way. He is like you—rather easily shocked."

"I am not easily shocked," returned Claud, resenting such an imputation with the natural fervor of a very young man.

"No? I thought you looked so. I am sure I should be shocked myself, if I had lived abroad all my life, and had made my first acquaintance with English society to-night. But you mustn't suppose that Lynshire always conducts itself like this. We can behave as nicely as any one else in London; only when we find ourselves all together in our own part of the world, we think we may put on our country manners. And we are all rather savages, as you see."

Miss Flemyng did not look at all like a savage. Claud, who was rather more observant of trifles than most men, had noticed that the dress she wore was assuredly not the handiwork of a provincial artist, and that her abundant brown locks were arranged in accordance with the latest mode. She moved and held herself in the indescribable style which only a woman of the world can acquire; her manner was perfectly easy and natural, and she seemed to be upon terms of the friendliest familiarity with the young men who spoke to her, from time to time, as she stood watching the dance; but she was not loud, like her friend Miss Croft, nor did she make use of the school-boy's slang which formed so large a portion of that young lady's conversation. Her chief claim to beauty, setting aside those of a neat, well-proportioned little figure and a general air of finish, consisted in a pair of dark gray eyes, which had been turned innocently upon Claud's more than once in the course of the evening, and had not failed to produce a certain impression upon him. He was glad to hear that Miss Flemyng lived within a few miles of Beachborough, for he thought he would decidedly like to see more of her.

"I am not going to dance any more," she said, after she and her partner had completed one perilous circuit of the room; "it's too hot and dusty and disagreeable. Do you think there is a balcony beyond that window, where the ferns are? If there is, we might go and sit there."

"I know there is," answered Claud, "because I was there earlier in the evening. And there is a particularly comfort-

able sofa there, too, where we can sit and watch the sea, which, after all, is a much pleasanter thing to look at on a hot night than those fat yeomen."

And now an awkward incident took place, which shows how thoughtless it is of people to bounce unexpectedly into dark corners. Claud pushed open the half-closed French window to let Miss Flemyng pass, and following closely upon her heels —"Here is the sofa," said he.

There it was, sure enough; and there, also, were two persons, seated upon it. Moreover, one of these persons happened to be in the very act of kissing the other. And then, as fate would have it, at that precise moment the moon emerged from behind a cloud, and threw a fine flood of silvery light upon the figures of Freddy Croft and Miss Lambert. The situation was a somewhat embarrassing one, and Claud did not mend matters by hastily whisking round and gazing out to the sea, with an utterly unsuccessful pretense of having seen nothing.

Miss Flemyng was less taken aback. She calmly surveyed the luckless couple for a second, which must have seemed to them an age; and then, stooping to pick up the train of her long dress, stepped quietly back into the ball-room.

She was laughing a little when her partner rejoined her. "How too ridiculous!" she exclaimed. "I shall never forget poor Freddy's face. I hope you are discreet, and can keep a secret, Mr. Gervis."

"Of course I can," answered Claud. "I wish it had not happened, though. Croft will think it so stupid of me; and really it almost looked as if we had done it on purpose."

"Oh, he won't mind," said Miss Flemyng, placidly. "Freddy s always kissing people, and always getting caught. I dare say Miss What's-her-name won't mind much either; she looks as if she was quite accustomed to that kind of thing."

"She may be engaged to be married to him, you know," remarked Claud, feeling bound to say a word for the unfortunate lady whom his awkwardness had compromised.

"Oh, I do hope not. Poor, dear little fellow! I should be so very sorry if he were to fall into such a trap as that. He and I have known one another since we were children, and he generally tells me about all his love affairs; but I have been away, and have never seen that monstrosity of a girl till this evening. You don't think there is really any danger, do you?"

Without knowing why, Claud felt vaguely annoyed by the anxious ring of Miss Flemyng's voice. "I can't tell anything about it," he answered, rather shortly. "He seems to admire her very much, and they are always together."

"Well, I wish they were not together now; or at least that they were together anywhere except in the one cool place in the building," remarked Miss Flemyng, with a laugh. "We shall have to take refuge on the staircase, I suppose."

To the staircase they accordingly betook themselves; and in that pleasant, untrammeled intercourse which is apt to arise between young men and women under such circumstances, and which, remote though it may be from serious love-making, is generally sweetened by some of the charms which attach to the unknown and the possible, Claud soon forgot all about Freddy Croft and his destinies. But when the last dance was over, and Claud was putting on his coat in the hall, his friend joined him, with a face preternaturally long, and said, in a solemn voice,

"I say, Gervis, let me walk a bit of the way with you, will you? I want to speak to you."

"Come along," said Claud. "Will you have a cigar?"

"Oh no," Freddy answered, shaking his head lugubriously; "I don't want to smoke."

He kept silence until he and his companion had reached the outskirts of the town, and then began—

"Do you know, Gervis, I have made an everlasting fool of myself."

"Ah! I can guess what you mean. I saw you doing it, didn't I?"

"I suppose you did. At least you saw me kissing the girl. But, dear me, that was nothing, you know."

"Wasn't it?"

"I mean, of course it was all right. I knew you and Nina Flemyng were safe enough; and really it was the sort of thing that might have happened to anybody. But, by George, sir!" continued Freddy, impressively, "do you know what that girl did as soon as you were gone?"

"Burst into tears?" suggested Claud.

"Not she! Began to laugh, and said that, now we had been so neatly caught, the best thing we could do was 'to give out our engagement at once.' I thought she was chaffing me first; but she wasn't—deuce a bit! She was as serious as I am now."

"I can quite believe it."

"Well, but, my dear fellow," resumed Freddy impatiently, "don't you see what a horrid mess I am in? I never meant anything of that kind at all; and how was I to suppose that she did? I don't want to marry anybody; and Miss Lambert of all people! She's a very jolly girl, and a first-rate dancer, and all that; but as for spending the rest of one's life with her!

—Oh, I'm simply done for, and I shall go and drown myself in the harbor."

"I don't think I would decide upon doing that quite yet," remarked the other young man pensively.

"What *would* you do, if you were in my place?"

"I should run away, I think. Have you committed yourself to anything definite?"

"Oh no. In point of fact, I rather tried to laugh the whole thing off; but she wouldn't have that at any price. And the worst of it is, I'm afraid she has told her mother. The old girl gave me a very queer sort of look when I put her into her carriage, and said she would expect to see me to-morrow afternoon."

"And what did you say to that?"

"I? Oh, I said 'Good night.'"

"That was vague enough, certainly," observed Claud, laughing. "Well, I have an idea. I think I can get you out of this. Only you must promise me not to see Mrs. or Miss Lambert till you hear from me again. Most likely I shall be with you before the afternoon."

"My dear fellow, I won't stir out of my bedroom," answered the affrighted baronet earnestly. "I'll stay in bed, if you like. Oh, if only I escape this time, not another woman under sixty years of age do I speak to!"

"It is possible to speak to young women without kissing them," Claud remarked sagely.

"It isn't easy, though," returned the other, sighing. "The safest plan is to let 'em alone."

"Ah, you are of Villon's opinion."

"Who was he?" inquired Sir Frederick. And Claud, laughing, quoted a recent translation of that mediæval miscreant—

> ". . . . Trust them, and you're fooled anon;
> For white or brown, and low or high,
> Good luck has he that deals with none!"

With which sweeping judgment upon the sex the friends parted.

CHAPTER V.

THE CRUISE OF THE "SIREN."

"UPON my word, Gervis, it's awfully kind of you, and I should enjoy the cruise above everything," said Freddy Croft; "but, look here—is it absolutely necessary for me to write to the old woman?"

"I think it would look better if you did."

"But lawyers and fellows always say it is the greatest mistake in the world to commit yourself to writing," objected Freddy, biting the top of his pen. "And I'm such a duffer at explaining things; I shall be sure to make a mess of it. What sort of thing ought one to say? I wish you'd dictate it to me."

"Very well; I will, if you like. I should make it something like this: 'My dear Mrs. Lambert.' Have you got that?"

"All right. Drive on."

"'MY DEAR MRS. LAMBERT,

"'Gervis has just come in to tell me that he has made up a party for a rather long cruise in his father's yacht, and he insists upon my joining it. We must get out of harbor with the next tide, he says; so I shall barely have time to pack up my things, and I am afraid I cannot possibly run round to bid you and Miss Lambert good-by. My plans are always very uncertain, and you will, of course, have left Beachborough long before I return home; but the world is so small, that we are sure to meet again some time or other; and I need not say that I look forward to a renewal of our acquaintance with the greatest pleasure.'"

"That *is* a buster!" remarked the docile scribe parenthetically.

"Scratch it out, if you choose; but it means nothing and it sounds polite. I don't think you need say any more, except that you are writing in great haste, and that, with kind remembrances to Miss Lambert, you are hers sincerely."

"'Yours sincerely, F. Croft,'" muttered the other, signing his name, and folding up the short note. "Yes, I think that will about do. I feel rather like a brute, though."

"You don't enjoy the sensation of running away: nobody does," remarked Claud. "But one has to choose between doing that and being eaten up, sometimes."

"What a hard-hearted beggar you are! Ah, it's all very well to laugh; but Miss Lambert isn't half such a bad girl as you think. I wish to goodness there was no such thing as marriage! Shall I send my fellow round with this now?"

"Not unless you want to have Mrs. Lambert here in a quarter of an hour. I think it had better not be put into her hands before we are well under way. She can hardly give chase, unless she charters a steam-tug."

The two young men were sitting in the deserted upper chamber of the Courtney Arms, which, for the previous ten days, had served as the officers' mess-room of the Royal Lynshire Yeomanry Cavalry. Reminiscences of the last breakfast partaken of together by those brave defenders of their

county and country still co:ered the long table, in the shape of empty dishes and cups, fragments of rolls and dirty plates. Freddy had pushed his on one side to make room for the blotting-book and inkstand by the help of which he had shaken himself free from Miss Lambert's toils.

"Ghastly-looking scene, ain't it?" he remarked. "That's the worst of this yeomanry business. Just when fellows have got to be comfortable together, and to understand one another's ways, the whole thing comes to an end. What a blessing that one hasn't got to stay on in this place, now that they are all gone! By the by, Gervis, you haven't told me yet what our party is to be."

"There is no party," answered the other young man, who had seated himself upon the window-sill, and was swinging his long legs and gazing down at the sunny street beneath him; "that was only a figure of speech. The fact is, that it was not until I was walking up the hill last night that I decided to ask the governor for the use of the yacht at all. I wanted to take my sister away somewhere for a time, because I—because of some family reasons; and of course there was not time to invite any one else. Oh, you need not look alarmed; I am not going to lead you into any fresh troubles. You are very unlikely indeed to fall in love with Gen, and I think I can promise that she will not become enamored of you, saving your presence. And Miss Potts will be there to play dragon."

"My dear fellow I didn't look alarmed; and I'm sure I don't want any dragon. Who is she?"

"Miss Potts? Well, she is Miss Potts—a nonentity, a lay figure—at all events, so far as you, or any other strangers, are concerned. She was my sister's governess once upon a time. Now I don't exactly know what she is—a sort of companion, I suppose you would call her. I am afraid you will find it all rather dull work, Croft; but there's no help for it. I have sent a note to old Knowles to ask whether he would care to come with us."

And I am credibly informed that the young baronet's rejoinder to this announcement was, "Oh, hang old Knowles!"

Pressed to explain this most unseemly and uncivil ejaculation, he proceeded, with his usual engaging candor: "Old Knowles isn't a bad old chap; only he will insist upon knowing all about his neighbor's business. Always asking questions and wanting to know all about everything. I've known him all my life, and I like him very well in his way; but he's a regular old Paul Pry, and that's the truth. I'd bet any money he hears the whole of this confounded affair of mine before we have been an hour on board."

I suppose that no more unfounded charge has ever been made since the day when the two men of Belial swore away the life of Naboth the Jezreelite. My failings and shortcomings are doubtless many, and I hope that I am not unconscious of the greater part of them; but that I, of all people in the world, should be accused of being a Paul Pry is really just a little too absurd. I protest that I have never sought any man's confidence; but surely it is no crime to take an interest in one's fellow-mortals; and why is it that so many people have chosen to make me the depository of their secrets, unless because I am generally held to be a pre-eminently safe man? And if, as a matter of fact, I did hear the whole of Freddy's "confounded affair" before I had been an hour on board the *Siren*, who was it, pray, who related it to me in fullest detail from beginning to end? Who asked my opinion upon his past behavior, and begged for my advice as to his future line of conduct? "Ach, mein lieber Sulzer," said Frederick the Great, "er kennt nicht diese verdammte Race!"—and I declare that, when that ungrateful speech of Frederick the little's was reported to me, I felt, as I often do, very much inclined to compare myself to the worthy Berlin school-inspector, and to wonder whether a good thick coat of selfishness and indifference is not, after all, a sensible man's best wear.

But these are personal matters, and have no direct bearing, I admit, upon the narrative in hand. What is certain is that, when the *Siren* cleared out of Beachborough harbor that afternoon, there might have been seen, reclining on a low wicker chair on her deck, a middle-aged gentleman of prepossessing exterior, the expression of whose countenance appeared to indicate—what in truth was the case—that he was contented with his company and was fully persuaded that his company was equally contented with him.

The situation, indeed, was one conducive to quiet satisfaction and oblivion of all petty worries. Ahead lay the broad blue sea, flooded with sunshine and swept by flying shadows from the summer clouds; astern was Beachborough, where people were just beginning to emerge from the houses for their afternoon stroll; and behind Beachborough were the woods of Southlands, and behind the woods, the hills, and behind the hills, the world. It was at least our world that we were parting from; and if there be a sensation calculated to fill a man's mind with peace, surely it is that of sailing away from all ties, duties and associations, and leaving no address behind him. The first strains of the band were wafted to us, mellowed by distance, as we glided past the pier-heads; the men, in their blue jerseys and red caps, were hauling up the mainsail, Claud

and Freddy lending superfluous aid, and making themselves very hot over it, as the manner of yachtsmen is; three idle persons, seated near the top of the companion, were watching the proceedings in silence, ducking their heads, every now and then, as the heavy boom swung over. The reader having already made acquaintance with the first and humblest of this trio, it only remains to introduce to him its two other members.

Any one who has seen the conventional French caricature of the *vieille miss anglaise* has seen Miss Potts; any one who has read an incidental sketch of an English lady-companion in a French novel is familiar with her peculiarities. She had the projecting teeth, the flaxen curls, the rigid backbone and the angular outline so dear to "Cham" and a host of others; and the moment I looked at her, I felt sure that she professed an extravagant prudishness, frequently made use of the word "shocking," ate much, spoke little, and employed her spare time in the production of washy water-color sketches. I don't pretend to say why this gross libel upon our national type should be so commonly met with in the flesh on the other side of the channel, and yet be extinct, or nearly so, on this; but the fact is undeniable; and Miss Potts' counter-parts are to be seen following in the wake of most of the well-born young ladies of continental Europe. Increased intimacy with that very estimable person confirmed my intuition with regard to her in every particular, and further revealed that her life was influenced by two ruling passions—adoration of her charge, and abhorrence of her charge's father.

Miss Gervis is less easy to describe. In the course of the six months that followed her entrance into Lynshire society I had various opportunities of hearing her discussed, and I am bound to say that the usual verdict upon her personal appearance was by no means what my own opinion of it would have led me to expect. Everybody admitted that she had fine eyes, and most people had also remarked her eyelashes, which were exceptionally long; but the fact of her having a brother whom she closely resembled, yet whose features were decidedly more regular than her own, was so patent that her critics seemed unable to get over it, and invariably ended by remarking what a pity it was that he should be so much the better-looking of the two. It is the old story: the many hate the risk and trouble of forming and declaring their own tastes, and prefer to accept their standard of the beautiful, as they do their religion and the cut of their clothes, from experts. We are somewhat behind the age down in Lynshire, and have hardly realized as yet that regularity of outline has fallen a little out of fashion.

I am afraid that my poor powers are quite unequal to defining the charm that Geneviève Gervis had for me from the first. A vague something, describable only in vague language —which I, as a plain man and no poet am averse to—a pathetic, far-away look in the large dark eyes, a certain wistfulness about the slow, unfrequent smile, a grace and languor of movement, betraying southern blood, a general air of quiet suppression rather painful to witness in a girl just entering on life—all these, combined with something, which, for lack of a better word, I suppose I must call her individuality, made up a whole entirely above the cut-and-dried canons by which it is commonly sought to measure and judge beauty. As she sat on the deck of the yacht there, gazing out at the far horizon, she roused my interest as well as my admiration; for I felt convinced that she had a "history." But there I was mistaken. History, in that acceptation of the term, she had none; nor was there anything in the records of her girlhood to justify a special air of melancholy. Who had ever ill-used her? Certainly not that urbane, cynical father of hers, who spent so little of his time beneath his own roof; not flighty, foolish Varinka, who would not have harmed a fly; nor Claud, the best of brothers, as he was the best of sons; nor the faithful and devoted Potts. When a girl who has liberty and amusing society and plenty of pocket-money persists in looking unhappy, may she not fairly be set down as silly and fanciful, and in need of what old maids call "a good shaking" to bring her to her senses? I don't know that anybody had ever said this to Geneviève; but I suspect that more than one person had said it *of* her—whether justly or unjustly the reader may decide when he shall know her better.

But now mainsail, foresail, jib and topsails are set; the *Siren*, heeling over under a steady breeze from the land, is rushing through the water at a good ten knots an hour speed; the two young men come aft, Freddy Croft to pour the tale of his misadventures into my sympathetic ear, and Claud to reassure Miss Potts, who is nervous at sea; we are fairly off on our voyage, and the odd thing is that not one of us has as yet thought of inquiring whither we are bound. I suppose we all felt that the question of our destination was one of secondary importance. Claud, no doubt, had plans; but it was just as well that he should keep them to himself. So long as we were free, and had a good ship under us, a clear sky over us, and a fair wind to send us on our way, what signified petty details?

"We knew the merry world was round,
And we might sail for evermore."

As a matter of fact, however, we did not get further than Portsmouth harbor that night. We went below to dinner with the coast of Sussex showing like a mere cloud-bank where the sea met the sky; but when we came up again the Isle of Wight was close upon our lee-bow; ahead of us, between it and the mainland, two strange-looking circular forts rose abruptly out of the deep; and it was evident that we were to pass the night in smooth water.

Miss Potts heaved a sigh of gentle satisfaction as she perceived our position. "It is so very dangerous to sail during the darkness," she murmured. "I never venture to undress until I know that the anchor is down. This seems to be a nice sheltered spot. I trust that we shall make it our head-quarters, and return here every evening."

"Well, I don't know for certain," said Freddy, in a confidential tone; "but I did hear a rumor that we were to get under way for America before daybreak."

"For America!" cried poor Miss Potts, aghast. "Impossible! You cannot be serious, Sir Frederick."

"Oh, yes. It is quite a common thing for yachts to cross the Atlantic nowadays, you know; and, after all, one doesn't often hear of their being lost—not *very* often, at least. The great danger is being driven out of one's course, or having a long spell of contrary winds. Then, of course, one may run short of provisions, and have to live upon odds and ends of things for a time; but that would be rather fun, don't you think so? I recollect hearing of one party who supported life for a week upon candles, after the biscuits gave out, and then they ate their boots, and then they fell to gnawing the rigging, and then—"

"Geneviève, my dear child," interrupted Miss Potts, "let us go on shore at once. Your brother may do as he likes; but I am responsible for you, I believe; and such an escapade as Sir Frederick describes would be not only dangerous, but in the highest degree improper. Mr. Claud, I am very sorry to be troublesome, but I must ask you to order the gig to be ready in half an hour."

"Quite out of the question, Miss Potts," answered Claud seriously. "I regret to have to inform you that the gig has sprung a leak, and that some one has taken the plug out of the cutter, and lost it. So you see, neither of them will be available to-night."

Miss Potts sighed, but did not allow her resolution to be shaken. "I have a duty to perform," said she. "Sooner than risk finding myself out in the Atlantic to-morrow morning, I will go on shore in the dingey."

"Then," remarked Freddy, "it's all up. You will be swamped to a moral, and both of you will be drowned; because I happen to know that not a man of the crew can swim two yards."

"Don't answer him, Miss Potts," said Geneviève. "He is only talking nonsense, and he would be as frightened as you are if he thought we were really going to cross the ocean."

From all of which it will be perceived that a pleasing familiarity had already established itself among us. Possibly the fact that certain members of our small party were of an exceptionally genial temperament may have had something to do with this; but no five people cooped up on board a yacht together can remain long upon distantly polite terms. They may become friends, or they may quarrel: mere acquaintances they can hardly continue to be. Life, indeed, in its social aspect, with all its complications and their causes and effects, resolves itself pretty much into a question of propinquity; and those who, carelessly or deliberately, throw their fellow-mortals together take a vast responsibility upon themselves.

The credit of the above sage reflection belongs not to me, but to Claud Gervis, who gave utterance to it in my presence on the second morning of our cruise, and who meant his words to apply to those whom we had left behind us, rather than to the company assembled on board the *Siren*, which at that moment was plunging through a fine rolling sea off the Needles. Geneviève, by means of a judicious arrangement of hassocks and rugs, had jammed herself firmly between the cabin skylight and the lee-bulwarks; Freddy was sprawling on the deck beside her; Miss Potts was below, with a prayer-book and a smelling-bottle; and my young friend and I, standing somewhat uncomfortably on the weather side, were steadying ourselves by holding on to the rigging.

"I was determined," says this astute schemer, "to give them a chance. I may have been utterly wrong; but I thought it was at least worth trying. They have never, in my recollection, been alone together for a day; and now they will have a fortnight, or perhaps more. If they disagree—well, we are no worse off than we were before. But don't you think it is a great deal more likely that they will find out that they have misunderstood one another, and that they will shake hands?"

I replied by some of the usual commonplaces referring to differences between husband and wife, and the proverbial fate of those who attempt to adjust them.

"Ah, but you do not understand," rejoined Claud. "How should you, when I do not understand myself? nor any one else either, I sometimes think. It is all a misunderstanding.

Varinka says she is misunderstood. The governor says nothing; but he is not a happy man, as you must have observed; and he has a softer heart than people give him credit for. Also he has too keen a sense of the ridiculous not to see the absurdity of two persons being shut up together in a country house, meeting a dozen times a day, and passing on with a bow. I think Varinka will make the first advance—she will be so horribly bored that she will not be able to help it—and if he does not meet her half-way, he will at least listen to her, and so they will get into conversation, and he will end by finding her as charming as every one else does."

"And will she find him equally charming?"

"She will, if he chooses that she should, you may be sure. No one can be more agreeable than the governor, when he likes. Certainly he does not often like; but that is because he so seldom thinks it worth while to exert himself for the benefit of strangers. And I suppose no one can expect to get on with a total stranger without some exertion."

"It is a question of temperament," says Claud's observant hearer, with a glance at the other side of the deck.

Indeed, I do not imagine that the favorable impression which Freddy Croft produced upon all sorts and conditions of men and women was due to any conscious effort on his part, or that, in prostrating himself at Miss Gervis's feet, he was doing otherwise than obeying the instinct which invariably led him to the neighborhood of the youngest and prettiest lady within reach. I did not overhear what he and Geneviève were talking about, being, as I have said, to the windward of them; but judging by the peals of laughter which rose from time to time, on the wind, they must have found one another highly entertaining; and when I saw Freddy carefully wrapping his mackintosh about his neighbor's shoulders to protect her from the spray, I perceived that the reign of Miss Lambert was already a thing of the remote past.

"*Un clou chasse l'autre*," muttered I to myself; but I did not repeat the observation when Claud asked me what I had said, for I thought we had had enough of personal topics for that morning, and besides, one never knows how young men will take speeches of that kind where their sisters are concerned.

When we had sighted Ventnor, and were in smooth water, Miss Potts appeared, looking a trifle pale and dazed, and was much relieved to hear that our programme for the day comprised nothing more ambitious than a sail round the island, and that we should probably reach our safe moorings again before dinner-time.

"That is by far the better and wiser plan," said she. "I

do not know whether your experience coincides with mine, Mr. Knowles; but, although I am not unaccustomed to yachting, I have never yet succeeded in reconciling myself to swinging tables. The illusion of stability which they convey to one of the senses, while the others are conscious of incessant and distressing motion, always seems to me to make the maintenance of personal equilibrium a doubly difficult task."

It was in this ponderous style that Miss Potts was in the habit of expressing herself when time was given her to choose her words carefully. She prided herself, I believe, upon the purity of her English, and would sometimes boast that not one of the foreign young ladies who had acquired our language under her tuition had ever been heard to make use of any of those vulgar idioms now too common in polite society.

"Of course, if you will persist in grasping the edge of the table for support whenever the vessel gives a lurch, you will find its stability an illusion and your personal equilibrium nowhere," remarked Claud. And after this, it became a standing joke with us to inquire after Miss Potts's personal equilibrium every morning.

We had many a joke together during that ten days' cruise, but I refrain from reporting them, for the above, which may be taken as a fair sample of their quality, will sufficiently show that they were not remarkable for any great brilliancy of wit. We laughed a great deal; and the truth is that it did not take very much to make us laugh. When I think of the voyage of the *Siren* from Beachborough to Portsmouth, and from Portsmouth to Swanage and Weymouth, and so along the Devonshire coast to Torquay, and the long, lazy days at sea, and the rambles on shore, and the swim in the early morning, and the last cigar on deck at night, and Evans the skipper's yarns, and Freddy Croft's novel practical jokes—when, I say, I recall these things, I can't, for the life of me, tell why I, a mere outsider and spectator, should have enjoyed it all so much. It was a great success, that yachting trip; but it was a wholly uneventful one; and of its various episodes two only stand out clearly from the rest in my memory—a discovery which we made the night we lay for the second time in Portsmouth harbor, and the squall which caught us in Torbay, and carried away our main-topmast.

There was a piano in the main-cabin—a jingling old instrument of the kind which one expects to meet with on board ship—its upper notes hopelessly flat, and its whole internal economy impaired by moisture and rough usage. Once or twice Claud had sat down before it, and picked out a few bars of a waltz; and sometimes Freddy, who, when he was not talking, was always

whistling or singing, would favor us with a stirring accompaniment to one of his music-hall ditties; but it was such a vile old thing, that it never occurred to either of us strangers to ask Miss Gervis to perform upon it. One evening, however, she chose to do so uninvited; and the moment her fingers touched the yellow keys I, for one, knew that we had an artist among us.

I said as much to Miss Potts, who seemed pleased, and nodded her head emphatically in reply. "We have lived a good deal in the musical world in Paris," she whispered, "and Geneviève's playing was thought very highly of by the best judges; but if you are fond of music, it is her violin that you ought to hear. My dear," she added aloud, "will you bring your violin out? Mr. Knowles expresses a desire—"

"I think if I did Mr. Knowles would soon express a desire for me to put it back again," answered the girl glancing over her shoulder, while she continued to play softly. "I should make a great deal too much noise for this tiny cabin."

"She wants to be pressed," said Claud. "Why was the violin brought on board, if it wasn't meant to be used, Gen?"

To this pertinent inquiry Miss Gervis vouchsafed no reply; but by way, I suppose, of showing us that there was at least no ground for the inference which Claud had drawn from her hesitation, she rose immediately and disappeared into her cabin, whence she presently emerged, bearing the instrument carefully and tenderly in her arms, after the manner of violinists, as though it had been a sentient creature. As soon as, with the aid of Miss Potts and the piano, she had tuned it to her satisfaction—a work of some little time and difficulty—she sat down, and, declining the elder lady's offer of accompaniment, began to play.

When I was a young man—in the era, that is to say, of pointed waists, bare arms, ringlets, and heelless shoes, attached to the wearer's foot by sandals—the harp used to be considered one of the most powerful auxiliaries of feminine charms; and I dare say that, in the year 1850, the spectacle of a fiddle-playing lady would have been held more deserving of ridicule than of admiration; but the times change, and we with them; and I suppose that nowadays the grace of the violinist's attitude would no more be disputed than the insipid tinkling which used to delight our ears would be compared to the divine harmony of the horse-hair and the cat-gut. If, after shaving to-morrow morning, the reader will take the trouble to raise his strop to his shoulder, to execute a pass or two across it with his comb, and to survey himself the while in his looking-glass, he will at once perceive the serious and rapt air conferred upon his features by that obligatory bend of the head

and outward glance; and although it is possible that he may not be possessed of a pair of eyes as large and soft, or of eyelashes as long as Miss Gervis's, yet imagination will doubtless help him a little here, and he will gain some notion of what it was that we saw in the dim main-cabin of the *Siren* on that summer's evening.

What we heard I shall not attempt to describe. I am not a musical critic, and were I to state honestly the effect produced upon me by Geneviève's playing, I should probably say some very absurd things, and convey an entirely false idea of her talent. Her execution, as I afterwards heard from competent judges, was faulty and her method unorthodox; but I do not fancy that, if I had been informed of this at the time, it would in any way have lessened my pleasure in listening to her. I have forgotten, if I ever knew, what it was that she played. As far as I remember, it was only a plaintive air, or succession of airs. The charm lay in the manner, not the matter. When amateurs wish to praise a musician who has pleased them, and are at a loss to define the secret of his power, they generally speak of his performance as "sympathetic." The adjective, in fact, has been made use of so unsparingly, of late years, that one has grown a little tired of it; but it has the advantage of being comprehensible; and, indeed, I suppose that it could have been only by the evoking of some common sympathy that Geneviève kept our little company silent and spell-bound for so long as she did.

That Freddy Croft was profoundly impressed his open mouth and the awe-struck admiration in his blue eyes sufficiently testified; nor have I the slightest doubt in my own mind that Geneviève's reign over the heart of this susceptible young gentleman is to be dated from that hour. When the last notes had died away, he relieved himself by a suppressed ejaculation, which, to an understanding ear, spoke volumes. What he said (for I happened to overhear him) was only "By *George!*" but it must be borne in mind that Sir Frederick belongs to an epoch and a school whose vernacular is nothing if not compendious. After this, it became an established custom that Miss Gervis should play to us every evening; and her melodies were always of the same order, old Italian ballads or plaintive French peasant lays—suited, I suppose, to the capacity of the audience, for Miss Potts was careful to explain that her pupil had studied under the first masters, and was capable of performances very different in difficulty from any that we had heard from her.

The crew used to steal up to the open skylights, and listen. I caught glimpses of their red caps sometimes against a strip

of starry sky. The steward would dawdle about in one of the cabins, leaving the door ajar; the captain generally posted himself half-way down the companion, pretending to consult the weather-glass. During that hour the whole ship's company was under the spell of the enchantress; and one of them, I think, was so successfully bewitched that he made no effort to recover his liberty for the remainder of the twenty-four.

Freddy Croft was no adept at hiding his feelings. If he disliked a man, he went as near telling him so as the customs of an over-sophisticated age will allow; if, on the other hand, he took a fancy to a new acquaintance, he began calling him "old fellow," slapping him on the back, and playing practical jokes upon him immediately. Now, being fully persuaded that Geneviève was his first and last love, he followed her about like a dog, and paraded his adoration in so open a manner that I was sometimes afraid lest Claud should think it his duty to make some remark upon it, and that so the harmony of our party might be disturbed. But nobody ever minded Freddy Croft. Even Miss Potts, whose views of flirtation in the abstract were those of an English old maid imbued with continental notions as to the bringing up of young ladies, would only smile when he showed some signal mark of infatuation, and whisper to me that Sir Frederick was a very charming young man; but mercurial, she feared—too mercurial. As for the object of this unstinted worship, she appeared to me to take it much as the rest of us did, rather as a joke than a reality, and to accept her slave's homage graciously, but without attaching too much importance to it. And so every one was contented, and the days went merrily by, and the prologue of this narrative approached its close.

It must have been about a fortnight from the time of our start, when, one hot, airless night, we drifted into Torbay. We had been loitering along the coast, without any definite plan, stopping where the fancy took us or as the winds and tides suited. Something had been said about visiting the Channel Islands, or running across to Cherbourg; but as none of us cared much in which direction our course might be shaped, except Miss Potts, who expressed a very decided opinion in favor of keeping in sight of the English coast, these projects had been allowed to drop; and now, pursuing our slow westward course, we were making for Torquay, having got belated, after a long day of calms and varying light airs.

"What is it going to be, Evans?" asked Claud, sauntering aft towards the skipper, who held the tiller, and glancing up at the flapping sails. "Any chance of a breeze, do you think?"

"We're a-going to have it poor and paltry, I'm afraid, sir.

As much as we shall do to get the anchor down by midnight." The air was heavy and close. In the afternoon a thunderstorm had broken far away to the southward; and that part of the heavens was still obscured by a bank of black clouds, against which the summer lightning flashed incessantly; but overhead the stars twinkled in a clear sky, the wind, what there was of it, coming in fitful puffs off the land. Geneviève and Freddy were leaning over the lee bulwarks, watching the phosphorescent light on the sea; Miss Potts was below; and I, stretched full-length upon a rug, was enjoying a cigar and one of those pleasing reveries which belong neither to wakefulness nor sleep. Possibly I may have crossed the border; at all events, it seemed to me that I had barely lost consciousness for a minute when I was startled by a shout from Evans behind me. Some stir and commotion was going on; I heard the sound of bare feet running on the deck; I glanced upwards, and saw that the stars had vanished; and then there came a roar and a shriek through the air, a shower of spray drenched me to the skin, and I was shot head over heels to the other side of the vessel.

"I expected this," I muttered, as I picked myself up; but no one heard this audacious assertion through the howling of the wind and the hissing of the rain, which had now begun to fall in torrents, and it is certain that, if I had foreseen what was coming, my prescience had not been shared by those who should have known better, for the squall had burst upon us before there had been time to shorten sail, and presently a loud crash let us know that we had carried away our main-topmast.

In the midst of the hurly-burly Miss Potts's head was seen appearing at the top of the companion.

"Don't be alarmed, Miss Potts," sung out Freddy, who happened to be close by; "there's no danger—there's no fear."

"I beg your pardon, Sir Frederick," she answered, in a sepulchral voice; "there may be no danger, but I can assure you that there is a great deal of fear."

I tried to persuade her to go below again; but she waved me aside. "I know my duty," said she. "Where is Geneviève? Let me go to her."

And, catching sight of her charge, who, wrapped in an oil-skin coat, was clinging to the bulwarks and watching the storm in perfect serenity, she staggered wildly across the deck, and flung her arms round her protectingly. I don't know what good the poor old soul imagined she could do; but it was rather touching to see how, in the midst of her own mortal terror, her chief thought was for her beloved pupil.

It was all over in less than a quarter of an hour. The wind and the rain swept away seawards, and from over the ragged edge of a black thunder-cloud the moon looked down upon a smoothly heaving sea. She looked down, too, upon a group which, somehow or other, has become permanently imprinted upon my mental vision. Why is it that certain people are associated in one's memory with certain circumstances, and that, in thinking of them, one's mind invariably and involuntarily recurs to some particular scene? Whenever my thoughts turned to Geneviève during the months that elapsed before we met again, I pictured her to myself as she stood that night in Torbay, upon the wet deck, her tarpaulin coat flung back from her shoulders, her dark hair a little blown about by the storm and glistening with spray-drops, the angry cloud-rack behind her, and the moonbeams falling upon that curious, wistful face. Miss Potts had not stirred from the attitude into which she had thrown herself in her first agitated impulse, and still clung tightly to the erect girlish form which seemed more fitted to lend support than to claim it. Facing this oddly-contrasted pair, and between me and them, were Claud and Freddy Croft, two dark, indistinct figures. I dare say my fancy may have been influenced in a great measure by what I had already been told about Miss Gervis's life and prospects; but it appeared to me, while I gazed at her in that weird light, as if she were standing alone in a stormy world, with no one but her trembling, grotesque-looking ex-governess to lend her a helping hand. I was making myself quite unhappy over it, when Freddy, in a loud, cheerful voice, said it was about time for a brandy-and-soda all round, after that. And so the group broke up, and my rather sinister vision was dispelled.

The next morning Claud and I went ashore to get our letters from the post-office; for, after all, it is not so easy to cut one's self off from civilization at a moment's notice, and I had found myself obliged to post a line at Lyme Regis, giving a clew to my whereabouts. Now, as I had expected, a fine crop of letters was waiting for me at Torquay, more than one of which made it advisable for me to leave for London by the first express train.

"Everything must have an end," says I consolingly, looking up from my correspondence at my companion, who lifted his eyes, with a rather chapfallen air, from his.

"I suppose so," he answered, sighing. "The misfortune is that things will not always end in the way they ought. Read this: it does not sound very hopeful, I'm afraid." And he handed me the following characteristic note.

"Southlands, 15th July, 187—.

"MY DEAR CLAUD,

"Your communication of this morning was a relief to me, for I was beginning to dwell with some uneasiness upon the extreme awkwardness of the situation that would develop itself in the event of your having been all drowned. It distresses me to cut short what seems to be a most enjoyable cruise; but I fear I must ask you to return here as quickly as you can. We have been doing our duty, the Princess and I, to the best of our ability. The nobility and gentry of the district have called upon us, and we have returned their visits. I think I may say that I have committed no solecisms, while the Princess has achieved that success which her many amiable qualities entitle her to expect. She now reminds me that the villa which she has taken for the summer-season at Trouville has been standing vacant for some weeks, and that if Geneviève is to accompany her thither, she ought to lose no further time in packing up her clothes and buying the necessary new ones.

"Our life here is conducive to health and admirably suited to contemplative natures; but it lacks that element of excitement which ladies accustomed to Parisian society naturally require. In fact, if it were not for a near neighbor of ours, Flemyng by name, and old Mrs. Knowles—both of whom are delightful characters in their way—it is just possible that I might find it a trifle wearisome myself.

"I hope young Croft's rest has not been disturbed by anxious thoughts of the girl he left behind him. Two days after your departure, the mother came up here, demanded to see me, and made such a noise that the servants were scandalized, and I fear jumped to mistaken conclusions. I waited until she had exhausted herself, and then gave her a glass of wine and begged her to go away, assuring her that I had not the most distant idea what had become of her faithless swain. I have since ascertained that she and her daughter have left the neighborhood; so Croft may return in safety.

"I shall be obliged if you will send me a telegram, on receipt of this, to say that you will be back in the course of three days. If the wind is contrary, the railway will restore you to your eager family.

"Affectionately,
"V. G."

Certainly, as Claud said, it did not sound very hopeful. I magnanimously forbore, however, to remind him that I had considered his experiment a doubtful one from the first, and, for want of something better to say, reverted to my original

undeniable proposition that everything must have an end; adding that I, for my part, must start, that same evening, for London, and suggesting that we might perhaps all travel together. But with a rising barometer and a fine westerly breeze blowing steadily in from the Atlantic, Claud would not hear of railway trains; and so, in the course of a few hours, I found myself bidding adieu to the new friends who already seemed like old ones, and whom I hoped never to lose sight of permanently again.

They all came up to the station to see me off; and Miss Potts actually forgot decorum so far as to wave her pocket-handkerchief when the train began to move and I stood at the carriage window, bowing a last farewell, with my hat in my hand.

I take off my hat to the reader too. The time has come for me to retire from the foot-lights and cease to distract the attention of the audience from the principal actors, who must now set about playing their several parts in earnest. From time to time I shall pop in unexpectedly, no doubt, much as I often do in real life; but with the progress of the drama I am in no way personally concerned; and I am conscious of having already thrust myself forward somewhat unwarrantably.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PRINCESS OURANOFF.

IT is marvelous—so I am informed—how little is known, or required to be known, of the antecedents of distinguished foreigners mixing in the highest circles of London society. Gossip busies itself with these eminent persons; stories are told about them, as about free-born Britons; but the general feeling appears to be that such stories are more likely to be false than true, that there is, at all events, no means of verifying them, and that, so long as the strangers have decent-sounding names, a sufficiency of money to spend, and the countenance of their resident minister or ambassador, London need ask no further questions with reference to them. And I have observed that a like generous disposition prevails in the somewhat lower stratum of society in which I have myself the honor to move. Living, as we do, in a right little, tight little island, the echoes of the continental capitals seldom reach our ears, and when they do, are apt to be received with that mixture of incredulity and contempt which their origin merits at the hands of a high-minded and truth-loving people.

But in Paris, the world's metropolis, it is otherwise. The

fashionable world of that gay city, connected by family ties with every aristocracy in Europe, drawing its ever-changing recruits from the four quarters of the globe, and furnishing the language in which all nationalities have agreed to interchange ideas, is never at a loss for information as to the past lives of its members, and hears the scandals of foreign lands as London hears the scandals of the provinces. Everybody in Paris, therefore, knew, with more or less of accuracy, the history of the Princess Ouranoff's life—a history the facts of which were, as it happened, so sensational that there was little scope left for exaggeration to improve upon them.

Within a year of her first marriage, the Princess Ouranoff found herself a widow, young, wealthy, beautiful and independent; and the very first use that she made of her freedom (after erecting a handsome granite monument over the grave of the elderly gentleman who had so obligingly provided her with a name and a fortune, and relieved her of their burdensome adjunct) was to start on a journey of discovery into the outer world. Russians and Americans, when they leave their respective fatherlands, gravitate invariably and inevitably towards Paris; but as the latter nation commonly make a brief halt on their way in London, so the former are wont to pause awhile at Dresden; and it was in the staid little Saxon capital that the Princess chose to pitch her wandering tent in the early days of her widowhood, ere yet the gloss was off her mourning robes or the bloom of youthful inexperience had been brushed from her mind.

It may be supposed that so rich a matrimonial prize was not suffered to remain long in seclusion, and that aspirants to the succession of the late Prince Ouranoff began to present themselves as soon as—perhaps a little sooner than decency permitted; nor is it likely that the Princess, whom Nature had dowered with an ample stock of vanity and excitability, would in any case have held out for more than a few months against the fascinations of one or other of her suitors. But the news of her sudden alliance with Count Ladislas Ponetzky, an out-at-elbows Polish refugee, took everybody by surprise, and was received with the greatest displeasure in high quarters at St. Petersburg.

This Ponetzky appears to have been an adventurer of the half-knave, half-dupe description so common among the ranks of patriotic conspirators. Possibly he may have told the truth in averring that he was bound, body and soul, to certain secret societies, and that his frequent and mysterious absences and his heavy calls upon his wife's purse were ordered by those whom he dared not disobey; but unfortunately he had other

habits not to be accounted for by any theory of exterior influences. The poor Princess, who had allowed the man's dare-devil bearing to take her heart by storm, had a bad time of it with him, by all accounts, and was probably not long in repenting of her bargain. Be that as it may, her second husband ceased to trouble her almost as speedily as her first had done. For, the police having caught him in the streets of Warsaw, one night, disguised in costume, and in liquor, he was incontinently packed off to Siberia, and, while making an attempt to escape on his way thither, was shot dead.

The Countess Ponetzky, now for the second time a widow, hastened to throw herself at the feet of the Czar, to implore his pardon, and to protest that her loyalty had never been shaken for a moment by the unhappy criminal who was no more. She was beautiful, she had been unfortunate, she pleaded very prettily—and she was forgiven. When Vincent Gervis, then a widower of some few years' standing, was appointed first secretary of embassy at the Russian court, and betook himself to his post with his two children, he found the Princess Ouranoff (she had resumed her first husband's name on her return home) living in great splendor at St. Petersburg, surrounded by parasites and looked upon with special favor by the imperial family.

Gervis at that time enjoyed the reputation of being one of the most fascinating men in Europe. He was no longer young, he had never been very good-looking, but he was certainly clever, and he had the rare gift of always knowing how to say the right thing to the right person. Moreover, he had married money, and was in far easier circumstances than the general run of diplomatists; and this of itself gave him a certain standing, the advantages of which he thoroughly understood. In short—not to waste time in chronicling unimportant details—he had no great difficulty in inducing the Princess to brave the perils of matrimony a third time. It was a love-match, some people said. Others, of course, asserted that the Englishman knew what he was about, and cared less for his bride's golden locks than for her gold coins. Others, again, shook their heads, and hoped the Princess might not have cause to regret the surrender of her fortune and her liberty to a man old enough to be her father; while some malicious persons laughed in their sleeves, and whispered that the fair Varinka was capable of giving a middle-aged husband some anxious hours. But what every one was forced to admit, in the sequel, was that the newly-married pair lived together in perfect amity and apparent mutual devotion for more than a twelvemonth. At the expiration of that time Mr. Gervis left the diplomatic service, and set out on a tour through Germany

and Switzerland with his wife, and St. Petersburg saw them no more. That some catastrophe, involving a permanent rupture between the husband and wife, took place during this journey every one is agreed; but how or when it occurred, or what its nature may have been, have always remained matters of surmise; for neither of the parties to the quarrel ever gave any explanation of it, and the two children, Claud and Geneviève, had been sent straight from St. Petersburg to Paris under the protection of Miss Potts, and consequently could not be called as witnesses by inquiring friends.

It was in the spring of the year that the Gervis *ménage* left Russia, and in the autumn the Princess Ouranoff established herself in that commodious *premier étage* in the Chaussée d'Antin which she occupied until the imperial demolitions of a few years back drove her to the Boulevard Malesherbes. Her husband set up his household goods on the story above; and in this strange fashion they continued to live, keeping separate establishments beneath the same roof, meeting occasionally upon terms of frigid politeness, from time to time showing themselves in the world together, but neither of them ever attempting by word or act to exercise the slightest control over the other's independence. The children formed the connecting link between the first and second floors, spending as much of their time in the one set of rooms as in the other, and bestowing perhaps the lion's share of their young affections upon the pretty, beautifully dressed step-mother, who played with them, took them out driving in the Bois, and gave them unlimited toys and bonbons, and who was herself so childish in many ways that they felt themselves upon a footing of equality with her, and never thought of addressing her by any other name than Varinka. And so, for a time, matters went smoothly enough, and if the children could have remained children always, the split in the household might have gone on being placidly and comfortably ignored; but when, in the natural course of things, Claud was sent to Eton, and Geneviève began to associate with other girls of her own age, it was inevitable that they should discover the antagonism that existed between their father and his wife, and perhaps no less inevitable that they should range themselves upon the one side or the other. In Claud's case no very strong feeling manifested itself, except a natural wish that two people whom he loved should be reconciled; but as the years went on, he became more and more his father's companion, and the feminine contingent were made to understand that bitter speeches about the head of the family must not be uttered in his presence. Character and circumstances converted Geneviève into a far more violent partisan.

Affectionate by nature, but reserved and somewhat over-sensitive, she loved the caresses and endearing epithets of which Varinka was ever prodigal as much as she dreaded Gervis's cold smile and sarcastic politeness. The former would devour her with kisses after a separation of twenty-four hours; the latter would go away for months at a time, and greet her with a cool nod on his return. Rightly or wrongly, she was persuaded that her father detested her; and at the time when this story opens, I fear that she was not very far from reciprocating the sentiment which she attributed to him. Miss Potts, who believed her employer to be a thoroughly wicked man—heartless, selfish, and cruel—was in a great measure responsible for this undesirable state of things; but the girl's antipathy had originated rather in pity for Varinka's supposed wrongs than in any resentment for neglect on her own score.

The Princess Ouranoff, indeed, was subject to odd, intermittent fits of terror of her husband—terror which Geneviève could only account for upon the hypothesis of some secret ill-usage, and which was wholly at variance with the cheerful little woman's customary demeanor. Sometimes, in the midst of her voluble prattle, Gervis would let fall some apparently innocent remark in his low, deliberate tones, and then the Princess's eyes would dilate, her flow of words would die away upon her lips, and she would cower before her husband, like a bird before a snake, he watching her, the while, from between his half-closed eyelids with an unfathomable expression. Most unprejudiced observers would have guessed that the lady had a bad conscience; Geneviève burned with an indignant suspicion that what she saw was a manifestation of sheer physical fright. And such was in fact the impression which Varinka did not hesitate to convey. "L'infâme! il m'a frappée!" she sobbed out, one day, when Geneviève found her in floods of tears in her drawing-room; and the girl believed the assertion, which happened to be an entirely false one, and never forgot it, even though she could not help knowing that her step-mother was habitually and incurably untruthful. She was not the only one who had been coaxed out of a rigid impartiality of judgment by the little Princess. Everybody agreed in pronouncing Varinka charming; no one thought of judging her by ordinary standards. She was born to be a spoilt child and as a spoilt child she was treated by all the world, with the solitary exception of her husband. At the age of thirty-five she was still as pretty and as girlish as she had ever been. Time and trouble had left no lines on her pink and white cheeks, nor was there any symptom, inward or outward, about her of the flight of youth. She lived a merry life in the merriest of

modern cities; she had as many admirers as a woman could wish for; and if there was a skeleton anywhere among her belongings, she kept it pretty successfully out of sight.

Such was the lady who welcomed Geneviève back to Southlands with an effusion which made the sober English servants stare.

"Come upstairs," she cried, passing her little arm round her step-daughter's waist; "come at once! I have a thousand things to say to you." And then, as soon as they were in Geneviève's room, with the door shut and locked—"At last!" she exclaimed, throwing herself down upon a sofa, and relieving her pent-up feelings by something between a yawn and a sigh. "Another week of that life, and decidedly I should have gone down to the sea and drowned myself!"

"Poor Varinka!" said Geneviève, compassionately. "It has been very bad, then?"

"Bad is not the word. It has been insupportable!—oh, but insupportable!" cried the Princess, whose English, though fluent and free from foreign accent, was constructed upon Gallic lines. "Imagine to yourself what a situation! Do you think I would ever have consented to it, if I had known what it was going to be? Do you think *he* would ever have consented to it? It is that unhappy Claud who is the cause of everything, with his absurd ideas. *Enfin*—since it is over now!—"

"Has he—has he made you unhappy?" asked Geneviève apprehensively.

These two, in talking together of Gervis, invariably made the personal pronoun do duty for his name.

The Princess broke into a little, high-pitched, not unmelodious laugh.

"Unhappy?" she echoed; "that depends upon what you call unhappy. He has behaved very well. I also—I have behaved *on ne peut mieux*. But what a life! *mon dieu, mon dieu*, what a life! Can you not see us sitting *tête-à-tête* at dinner; he at one end of a long table, I at the other, both perfectly silent, and three servants staring us out of countenance? There were moments when I felt I must scream with laughter—only I was frightened, and that preserved me. You know that terrible polite manner which freezes the marrow of one's bones—'At what hour would you like the carriage to-day? It is time to return Lady Jones's visit, and, with your permission, I will accompany you.'" Here the Princess gave a very fair imitation of her husband's languid manner and drawling enunciation. "I reply, 'Pray do not sacrifice yourself; I am capable of facing *miladi* alone.'—'Do not mention such an ugly word as sacri-

fice' (with the air of a saint and martyr); 'the duty of paying a visit of ceremony will be made more than pleasant by the charm of your society.' Then off we go, in a big barouche, through the dusty roads and lanes, *cahin-caha*. Sometimes he points out the beauties of the landscape; but more generally he lies back, with his eyes shut, and says nothing. All the time the devil is playing with my poor nerves. I experience the strangest sensations. I long to do something desperate—to tickle him or to knock off his hat. Then comes the visit. Oh, these English! one must see them in their own country homes to understand to what a point they can be stupid, ignorant, awkward! *He* likes them. He finds them good people, and amusing in their fashion. It is to irritate me that he says such things, I suppose. Two of them are to dine here to-night—a Mr. Flemyng and his daughter. She is not so bad—a pretty girl, clever, and well-dressed—the only Englishwoman I have met here who is not quite a barbarian. As for him, he is a *savant*, a philosopher with white hair, who talks, talks, talks. I do not understand him, and I do not listen to him. Ah, well! I am near the last day of it all now; and I shall not soon be caught in this country again, I promise you. *Dis donc*, can you be ready the day after to-morrow?"

"Of course I can be ready, if I am to go," Geneviève answered, a little absently. She had been standing at the window, looking out at one of the loveliest views in England, and perhaps had not been paying much attention to Varinka's graphic sketch of life at Southlands.

"If you are to go!" shrieked the Princess, starting up from her sofa, and pouncing upon the speaker, like an angry little sparrow. "You speak as if you would rather not go. Ah, I understand—you are like the rest; you are tired of me, and wish to drive me away. You are quite right. Desert me, and you only desert a most unfortunate woman, who never brings good luck to those whom she loves. But I thought you were more constant, Geneviève."

And the little lady hid her face in her hands, and sobbed.

Geneviève drew away those plump, jeweled fingers gently, and held them between her own, which were larger, firmer, and, as some people thought, better shaped. She was accustomed to such outbreaks, and knew that there were no tears in the Princess's eyes. "How can you talk such nonsense, Varinka?" she said. "My home has always been with you, and always will be. What other home could I have?"

The Princess was speedily pacified, and, after many embraces offered an apology and an explanation. "I ask you a thousand times pardon for having doubted you. It was foolish

of me—it was wicked—but my nerves have been upset. Listen," she went on, lowering her voice mysteriously; "I think he has a plan about you."

"A plan about me? That would be something new. In general, I doubt whether he knows that I exist when I am not in the room."

"Ah, bah! he forgets less than you think. The other day, he terrified me by asking suddenly, *à propos* of nothing at all, whether I had found a *parti* for you yet; and when I answered that you were too young, and that I had not dreamt even of such a thing, he remarked, 'That is well; for I should not consent to her marrying a Frenchman.'"

Geneviève laughed. "Is that all?" she asked.

"That is all he said at the time; but coming from him, that means a great deal. And afterwards he asked me whether I held very much to taking you to Trouville. I am convinced that he has the intention to marry you to some Englishman; and probably—for you know he never speaks until he has made up his mind—he has already fixed upon the person. That young man who was on board the yacht with you is well-born and rich, is he not? All this, do you see, is done on purpose to spite me. He knows very well that I—ah!"

This sharp ejaculation was called forth by a certain change which the Princess's quick observation had detected upon the countenance of her companion. The daylight was fading fast; but there could be no doubt that Geneviève was blushing, nor that she was struggling ineffectually to keep back a smile from her lips. The Princess saw, and jumped, as usual, to conclusions.

"It is as I suspected, then! It was he who planned this voyage. He has laid a trap for you, and already you have walked into it. No! do not answer me; I see it all. You have permitted yourself to fall in love with the first man who has paid court to you; and now I shall be left alone in the world. Was ever any one so unfortunate as I am!"

Geneviève laughed outright. "Was ever any one so unreasonable? you ought to say. If I am to be married to an Englishman, or to any one else, against my will, as you seem to expect, it will not be to Sir Frederick Croft, who is a very nice little man, but who will not ask me. Don't you know that the reason of our taking him away in the yacht was that he is desperately in love with some lady from whom his friends want to rescue him? You need not be alarmed, Varinka; that prize is not for me."

"Why did you blush, then?" asked the Princess suspiciously.

"I did not blush."

And with this audacious falsehood on Geneviève's part the colloquy came to an end; for now the sound of a distant gong was heard, and the Princess, hurrying towards the door, explained: "It is their way of announcing dinner. Come; he will be furious if he is kept waiting."

If Mr. Gervis was ever furious, he certainly did not manifest his fury through any of the ordinary channels; nor could any one have looked meeker than he did when the two ladies entered the drawing-room. He was sitting in a low arm-chair, twirling his thumbs, and listening with respectful attention to a hale, venerable-looking gentleman, who, with one fat hand thrust into his waistcoat and the other gently beating time to the measure of his periods, was apparently delivering a carefully-prepared speech to an audience of one. The orator broke off to shake hands with his hostess and to bow to Geneviève, and then resumed the thread of his discourse.

"Yes, my dear Mr. Gervis, education, if bestowed in the manner now proposed, will prove a curse to this country, not a blessing. It has been truly said that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing. Dangerous, I would add, in more ways than one. So long as the laboring classes remain totally ignorant they will accept their lot in life as a necessity, and will consent to be led by those who know better than they can do what is best for them. But teach the working-man to read, and then leave him to himself, and what is the result? Why, that, instead of reading what will open his mind and lead him towards a true understanding of the nature of things, he turns to the vile newspapers whose sole mission it is to make him dissatisfied. Knowledge is like a nettle. Touch it, and it will sting you; grasp it firmly, and—and—er—"

"You can make soup of it," suggested Gervis.

"Just so. The very illustration I was about to employ. From the earliest times, it has been a necessity of social life that the ruder kinds of manual labor should be performed by the ignorant; and if you insist upon educating these people against their will, the end of it all will be that—among other things—you will have no agricultural laborers left."

Geneviève listened with some interest to the handsome old gentleman who stated his opinions with so much sonorous decision. Of the merits of the question which he was discussing she knew nothing; nor was it so much what he said as the way in which he said it that, taken in conjunction with an expansive forehead and flowing white hair, impressed her with the conviction that she was in the presence of a man of wisdom and experience. Such was in fact the character which Mr. Flemyng bore among his neighbors, upon whom the capacious fore-

head and the silvery locks had not been without their effect. A country gentleman who had never mounted a horse nor fired a shot must, these good folks reasonably argued, have something phenomenal about him; and as Mr. Flemyng was evidently not a lunatic, it had long been agreed upon all hands to set him down as a genius. The ascertained fact that he spent the best part of his time in his library seemed to add confirmation to this view; and now for many years Mr. Flemyng had been known throughout the length and breadth of Lynshire as a very superior person indeed. Mrs. Knowles, it is true, had been heard to assert that he was the biggest fool that ever stood in two shoes; but Mrs. Knowles's judgments were notoriously emphatic rather than just, and it was thought that, being herself a superior person, she might not be wholly free from jealousy of a possible rival.

At the dinner-table Geneviève found herself seated next to the sage, who, before long, condescended to address her directly.

"You have lived all your life abroad, Miss Gervis, I understand. Now, how does England strike you, looking at it, as you must do, from a foreigner's point of view?"

Geneviève began to think that a man who could ask so exasperatingly silly a question as this could hardly be a modern Solomon, after all.

"I am an Englishwoman, although I was brought up abroad," she answered, an answer of some kind being necessary.

"Just so—just so. I myself am a cosmopolitan. Much as I value the privileges of a British subject, I cannot help seeing that the French have the advantage of us in some respects, the Germans in others, and the Italians, again, in others. Patriotism consists in serving one's country, not in extolling it at the expense of the rest of the civilized world."

"I have long suspected that I was a patriot," murmured Gervis from the end of the table; "now I am convinced of it. You have such a clear way of putting things, Mr. Flemyng."

Mr. Flemyng smiled complacently. "Miss Gervis has not yet answered my question, though," said he.

"First impressions are difficult to state concisely, and are seldom to be trusted when stated," observed Miss Potts in a solemn voice, breaking silence for the first time.

Mr. Flemyng adjusted a pair of gold-rimmed eye-glasses on his nose, and took a leisurely survey of the speaker. Persons in the position of Miss Potts should not be so ready to obtrude themselves, he thought. After a pause, he nodded at her patronizingly, remarked, "Very true—very true," and then turned to the Princess, who was yawning behind her fan.

"As for you, madam, I fear we shall never succeed in naturalizing you among us. Paris has attractions which we cannot aspire to rival. You mean to desert us in a few days, I am sorry to hear."

"It is very amiable of you to say that you are sorry," replied Varinka. "I, too, am sorry to leave such charming acquaintances; but I have my little cottage at Trouville: as it is there, I am bound to make use of it, you understand."

"To be sure. A most interesting neighborhood, that of Trouville. Did you ever turn your attention to the subject of geology? I know of no district more rich in fossils than the Norman and Breton coast."

Mr. Flemyng had a good deal to say upon this topic, and said it at considerable length, while the Princess yawned undisguisedly, and occasionally made a grimace, indicative of weariness and despondency, at Geneviève. Four out of the seven people seated round the dinner-table probably found the banquet a very tedious one; but to counterbalance that, the remaining three enjoyed themselves amazingly. Mr. Flemyng was always happy, so long as he was permitted to declaim without interruption; and his daughter and Claud, whose acquaintanceship had been renewed with satisfaction on both sides, had no objection to the sonorous stream of words, under cover of which they were enabled to exchange their own observations, unheard by others.

"Well, and how have you been amusing yourself since we met last?" was the young lady's first question. "Any more balcony-scenes? I suppose you know that the one subject of conversation hereabouts for the last fortnight has been your spiriting away of Freddy Croft. You have made a friend and an enemy. Lady Croft would go through fire and water for you, and Mrs. Lambert, I believe, has sworn to have your blood. Luckily for you, she herself has suddenly vanished—leaving her bills unpaid, they say. What should you have done if she had brought an action for breach of promise, and called you as witness of a certain interesting episode?"

"You would have been called too," remarked Claud.

"I suppose so. What *should* we have said? Is it very wrong to perjure one's self in a good cause, do you think?"

"Very, I should say. It lays you open to imprisonment, with hard labor, too, which you would not much like."

"I would chance that. At all events, nothing would have induced me to tell the truth."

"Croft is very fortunate to have such a thorough-going partisan at his back."

"Oh, I would do as much as that for anybody. When one

has seen a thing which one has no business to see, the least one can do is to behave as though one had not seen it. Not but that I do feel a special interest in Freddy. We are very old friends, he and I. Who is his latest flame? Your sister?"

"Geneviève? Oh, dear no, I don't think so. What could have made you imagine such a thing as that?" asked Claud, in a somewhat displeased tone.

"Don't look so angry. I did not mean to be impertinent; and I know brothers can never believe that it is possible for any one to fall in love with their sisters. I only asked, because Freddy would not be Freddy unless he was profoundly enamored of somebody; and as there were only two ladies on board your yacht, I believe, I chose the one that seemed to me most likely to attract him. But perhaps he has succumbed to the charms of the governess."

"Perhaps he has. Miss Potts is not exactly beautiful to look upon; but she has all the virtues. I don't know any one more morally beautiful than she."

"And your sister—is she morally beautiful too? She has a charming face. I wonder whether she would allow me to make friends with her."

Claud said he could not imagine any one refusing Miss Flemyng's friendship.

"And yet, strange as it may appear, such a thing has been known to happen. I can generally hit it off pretty well with any description of man, so long as he is a gentleman; but with girls I am not quite so sure of being successful. Perhaps that is because I like men so much better than women. It doesn't sound well to say so; but it is true, and I always try to tell the truth. In the same way, I never attempt to disguise my feelings towards children—whom I abhor."

"I don't think you really mean that," said Claud.

"Yes, I do, otherwise you may be sure I should not say it; for nothing lowers one's character so much in the eyes of most people as that admission. You, for instance, cannot even bring yourself to believe in such unnatural heartlessness. All the same, I dare say, if the truth were told, you are not very fond of children yourself."

"I suppose you will put me down as an impostor if I say that I am."

"No; I will take your word for it. But most likely you have not had much to do with them. You don't know what it is to have seven small brothers and sisters who set it before themselves as the chief aim of their existence to worry you out of your senses. I don't ill-treat them or box their ears, you

know, and they don't dislike me. On the contrary, I believe they are very fond of me; and I have a proper amount of sisterly affection for them as individuals. Collectively, I think they are simply odious. Some day you must bring your sister over to our tumble-down old house for a game of lawn-tennis, which is our one stock amusement; and then your love for children will be put to the test. If you encourage them to overcome their shyness—which you most likely will do, being inexperienced—they will immediately hang themselves about you, like a swarm of bees, and pull your hair, and knock your hat off, and run away with your stick; and the chances are that you will end by losing your temper. I warn you that I have not the smallest control over them; so now you know what you have to expect."

"I think I can promise not to lose my temper," said Claud laughing. "Are you the eldest of the family, then?"

"I hold that proud position at home for the present. I have three elder brothers, all in the navy, and all on foreign service. The rest will follow suit, I expect, unless something better turns up. It is the cheapest profession for a young man—or rather the least ruinous. I ought to mention that we are dreadfully badly off; absolute paupers. I dare say you have noticed that people with large families invariably are."

"You don't bear the outward signs of extreme indigence," remarked Claud, with a side-glance at his neighbor's toilet, which indeed was a model of careful finish. "As for comparative poverty; I confess I don't consider that any misfortune at all."

"Oh, don't you? It seems that our tastes differ in more points than one. You like children and straitened means; I like independence and wealth. What a sad pity it is that we cannot change places!"

These last words, happening to coincide with a pause in the general conversation, reached the ears of the philosopher on the other side of the table.

"Ah, the old story!" said he, with the compassionate smile of one above ordinary human frailties. "Every one fancies his neighbor's lot a happier one than his own. My dear young people, believe me, if you could make the exchange you wish for, you would find it a very bad bargain, and would soon long to be back in the state of life for which your education and training have fitted you. You remember Horace's Satire, Mr. Gervis—

"Qui fit, Mæcenas, ut nemo quam sibi sortem
Seu ratio dederit, seu fors objecerit—"

But Mr. Flemyng was not allowed to finish his quotation; for at this point the Princess rose unceremoniously, and made for the door.

"That man is capable of reciting an entire Latin poem without drawing breath," she whispered to her step-daughter, as she pushed her gently out of the room before her.

CHAPTER VII.

EXIT VARINKA.

THE Princess spent a dull and weary evening. While the ladies were alone it was not quite so bad; for Miss Flemyng had a great many questions to ask as to how people were wearing their hair in Paris, and whether short dresses were really coming in again, and so on; and these were subjects upon which one could at least speak with some interest. Moreover, it transpired that the young woman possessed some twenty or thirty yards of real old point d'Alençon, which she wished to dispose of to a friend—being, as she honestly confessed, in sad want of ready money—so that there seemed to be the possibility of a genuine bargain in view. But no sooner had one begun to feel one's way a little, remarking that old lace was entirely out of fashion, but that it might be worth inspecting as a curiosity, than the droning of that insupportable old father's voice was heard coming nearer and nearer. Presently it was in the room; and then—*bonsoir!* What idea had he in his head, that solemn, heavy animal, to plant himself directly in front of your chair, and to stun you with his interminable harangues? Why could he not stay in the dining-room, and stupefy himself with port wine, like the other rustics? Did he imagine, by any chance, that it was amusing to hear him talk? Varinka, groaning inwardly, sighed, yawned, and affected inattention; but all was of no avail. Mr. Flemyng had no more compassion upon her than had the Ancient Mariner upon the wedding guest. He had certain observations to make, and he intended to make them: whether his hearer were pleased or not was a detail of comparatively small importance to him.

It was no less a matter than the destiny of the immortal soul that he had brought in with him from the dining-room, and was complacently treating of. In a casual, impartial manner, he cited authorities. Origen and Bishop Butler, Plato and Louis Figuier—a queer medley of writers, ancient and modern, jostled one another in his glib discourse. He had a word

of admiration for Socrates and of patronage for St. Paul. So much erudition might well have surprised any one who had not read the last number of the *Bi-Monthly Review*, whence the greater part of these quotations and comments were drawn. Varinka, in spite of herself, was somewhat impressed. Gervis, leaning back in his arm-chair, with his white face resting upon his folded white hands, listened imperturbably, and from time to time suggested some trifling difficulty, which the orator disposed of by a hasty "Yes, yes—exactly so." Claud had slipped away to the billiard-room to smoke a cigarette; and through the open doors could be heard the distant click of the balls which he was knocking about all by himself. Nina Flemyng was sowing the seeds of a friendship with Geneviève in the gloom of the conservatory. Miss Potts, bolt upright in her cane chair, was struggling with sleep, and getting the worst of the contest. "Three or four more evenings like this, and I would take poison," thought the poor Princess.

At length came the welcome sound of wheels upon the gravel. Heaven be praised! they were going then, at last. Miss Flemyng emerged, with somewhat suspicious alacrity, from the conservatory to make her adieux.

"Good night, madame; so very sorry we are to lose you so soon. I will send up the lace to-morrow morning for you to look at. Oh, not the slightest trouble in the world. I should like you to see it, because I believe it really *is* good. *Good* night. Good night, Mr. Gervis."

It was not to be denied that, for a provincial, the girl had pleasing manners enough.

Claud and Geneviève accompanied their guests into the hall, where many last words of a less formal character were interchanged. A good ten minutes elapsed before the carriage drove away, and Claud could ask his sister's opinion of their new friends.

"I don't know them well enough yet to judge what sort of people they are," she answered.

"But you know whether you like them or not. Miss Flemyng is very anxious to make friends with you."

"So she says. Don't you think she is a little too—too expansive?"

"No, I don't," answered Claud, decisively. "I don't think so at all. I think she is charming; and so will you, when you know her a little better. I hope we shall see a great deal of the Flemyngs this summer. I am going to take you over there on Thursday, you know."

"But I shall be gone before then," said Geneviève.

"I would not quite make up my mind to that, if I were you,"

Claud remarked, lighting his cigarette, as he stepped out into the porch.

Geneviève followed him, and stood leaning against a pillar overgrown with clematis and Virginia creeper, while she gazed up at the twinkling stars. "My mind is made up for me," she said. "I have only to do as I am told, you know."

"And supposing you were told to remain where you are?"

"I should have to remain, of course," answered Geneviève. "That is the worst of having been born a woman; all one's life long one will have to obey somebody. But I don't know," she added presently, in a tone of suppressed resentment, "why I should be ordered to stay here, where I am not wanted, when Varinka really does want a companion."

"Who says you are not wanted here?" returned Claud. "I want you. The governor wants you."

"Why does he want me?" asked the girl, bitterly. "Because he will have no *souffre-douleurs* when Varinka is gone?"

"See here, Gen," said Claud, throwing away the end of his cigarette and drawing a step nearer to his sister; "I wish you would try to get on a little better with the governor. After all, he is your father."

"Oh, yes, I know that," answered Geneviève quietly. "And he is Varinka's husband."

Claud gave his shoulders an impatient jerk. "Suppose we leave that question alone," he suggested. "It has two sides to it, I dare say, like most questions; and it seems just on the cards that we may not know much about either. I have tried interference, and it has not been a brilliant success. Let them settle it in their own way. At all events, the governor has never done *you* an injury."

Geneviève broke off a spray of clematis, and twisted it between her fingers, without replying.

"And he wishes you to stay in England for a short time and make acquaintance with English people. Surely that is not such a very great thing to ask. Don't you see what a difference it will make, if we have ladies in the house? What could he and I do, if we were all alone here? We could not amuse ourselves, nor entertain our neighbors, nor make a home of the place at all; and the end of it would be that, in a few weeks' time, it would be shut up, and we should begin wandering over the face of the earth again. But if you are here, the Crofts can come, and—and Miss Flemyng, and lots of people; and you need not be afraid of being dull. There are races, and cricket matches, and regattas, and no end of things coming off—I was talking it all over with Freddy Croft the other day—it would be quite a new experience for you."

"But Varinka wants me," said Geneviève, wavering.

"H'm!"

"Oh, I know I'm not indispensable to anybody," returned the girl, rather sadly. "It is not that. Only you don't think of Varinka, and of how dull it would be for her to be in Trouville without any companion at all."

"Now, my dear Gen, did you ever know Varinka at a loss for a companion in your life? Do you seriously mean to tell me that she has not fifty bosom friends at Trouville? And if she wants to fill her house with aunts and cousins, won't they swarm round her, like so many flies, at a word? Besides, the governor told me before dinner that he would answer for her consent."

"Naturally. If I told my maid to sit up all night, I would answer for her consent. But she would not like it."

"Well, well; Varinka isn't a free agent, it is no use bothering about her, is it? Setting her aside, would you not rather be here than at Trouville?"

And then Geneviève confessed that she would like to see a little more of England before leaving it.

In the mean time, a characteristic dialogue was being carried on in the drawing-room, where Mr. Gervis and his wife had been left to themselves.

"I have a small favor to ask of you," the latter began, rather nervously, as soon as the door had closed behind her guests.

"By a singular coincidence," remarked Mr. Gervis, "I also have a small favor to ask of you. Which of us shall ask first?"

"Oh, you, if you please. I can wait."

Mr. Gervis accordingly stated briefly his wishes with regard to Geneviève, and received full in his face the shower of high-pitched protestations for which he had been prepared.

"But it is unreasonable—simply unreasonable—what you ask of me! If at least you had told me a week or two ago, then I might have found some one to take her place; but now I shall be shut up in my little hut over there, like a squirrel in a cage; for you do not suppose, I imagine, that I shall have the courage to walk about the *plage* without so much as a dog or a cat of my own to keep me in countenance. Ah, if you knew the tongues of those ladies! I can hear them from here! No; it is impossible!—it is not to be thought of! If it were for the poor child's happiness, I would not say so much; I would try to arrange something. But I know what a cruel disappointment it will be for her; she does not amuse herself any better in this country than I do. For the rest, I have guessed your plan long ago; you are going to marry her to some heavy Englishman or other, who will make her perfectly wretched."

"I assure you," said Gervis, composedly, "that I do not contemplate anything of the kind. I have no desire that she should marry at all for some time to come. Indeed, to tell you the truth, one of my reasons for wishing to detain her here is that I am afraid of your arranging a match for her with a Frenchman—which, as I told you the other day, I could not sanction."

"Do you think I am in a hurry to be more solitary than I am already? When Geneviève marries, I shall have no one in the house with me but servants for nine months out of the twelve."

"Quite so. But with persons of your generous and unselfish temperament one can never feel secure. However, I think you may count upon the young lady's being restored to you unmarried and unengaged before the autumn."

"If you will promise me that— Still there remains the question of the summer. Certainly I am no longer a very young woman; but I am not yet either old enough or ugly enough to appear at a watering-place without anything in the shape of a companion."

"I quite admit that. Will you have Potts?"

"No," answered the Princess, almost fiercely. "I will not have Miss Potts. I am not fond of being spied upon. Oh, I know more than you think. I know why you suggest Miss Potts."

Gervis, who had been lying back in his chair, slowly raised himself now, and looked his wife steadily in the face. "May I ask what motives you impute to me?" he inquired blandly.

Varinka opened and shut her fan several times, and then turned away, with a short embarrassed laugh. "It is of no consequence," she answered. "I did not mean to impute anything."

"Oh, I thought you did," said Gervis, sinking back again. "But, as you say, it is of no consequence; and the admirable Potts is not without defects. No doubt you will easily induce one of your relatives to fill her place. And now about the favor you said you had to ask of me. Perhaps I may make so bold as to assume that it is connected with ways and means."

The Princess nodded.

"How much?" asked Gervis, laconically.

Varinka hesitated a moment, and then, bending forward, mentioned a sum so large that even Gervis, who prided himself upon never manifesting surprise, could not repress a slight elevation of the eyebrows. He made no remark, however, but got up in his slow, languid way, and crossed the

room to a writing-table, at which he seated himself, and began writing a check.

Varinka murmured some confused explanations. "Those Paris tradesmen are brigands—if you saw the bills I have had to pay! I was obliged to have the whole *appartement* painted and papered in the spring. And the new victoria that I told you of—I am convinced that I paid for it twice over; only I could not find the receipt. But all that is nothing. It was my Aunt Sophie who appealed to me for help. You know, one cannot refuse one's own flesh and blood, and without this advance she would have been simply ruined. Her estates have not brought her in a sou this year. Perhaps before Christmas I may be able to repay you a part—"

Gervis never turned his head. He signed the check and blotted it carefully; after which, he rose, and held it out to his wife with a faint smile. "Your Aunt Sophie must be a very extravagant person," he remarked.

Varinka looked at him in silence for a moment. Then, as if prompted by an irrepressible impulse, "You do not believe what I say," she cried.

"Not in the least," answered Gervis, with perfect composure.

The Princess burst into a peal of genuine, unaffected laughter, checking herself abruptly in the midst of it, like a child afraid of being scolded.

"I ought really to apologize for my rudeness," Gervis said. "It must be the insular climate that is brutalizing me already. My only excuse is that you told me, yesterday morning, that that aunt of yours had inherited a second fortune."

"It is true. I had forgotten," answered Varinka, laughing again. She was not at all offended or ashamed; only a good deal amused at her own stupidity and her husband's odd ways.

"Shall we strike a bargain?" suggested the latter. "We each began by saying we had a favor to ask. You are now in a position to minister to the wants of your Aunt Sophie, or perhaps of a person still nearer and dearer to you. Allow me, on my side, to keep Geneviève for a few weeks, and so to gratify the whim of a person especially dear to me."

"I do not understand. What persons are you speaking of?" asked Varinka, with a troubled look.

"My dear madam, is there any one in the world whom you and I love more than our respective selves?"

"Ourselves?"

"I say, ourselves—not one another, *bien entendu*. You will be so kind, then, as not to oppose me in this small matter? A thousand thanks. Your *protégée* shall be restored to you as soon as she finds us intolerable; possibly even sooner."

"And you will promise me that she shall not marry that young man whom you sent on board the yacht with her?"

"Heaven forbid that I should make any promise at all where a woman is concerned! But I will go so far as to say that I cannot conceive anything more improbable."

And with this strong expression of opinion Varinka was fain to be satisfied. After a few minutes she retired for the night, Gervis holding the door open, and bowing ceremoniously, as she rustled past him; but before going to bed, she paid a visit to her step-daughter's room in order to announce that she had changed her plans. She had a queer sort of caricature of a conscience, which may perhaps have suggested to her that some equivalent was due for the check which she had thrust into her pocket.

"After all, I am going to leave you in the castle of the ogre," said she cheerfully. "I have been thinking things over, and I have made up my mind not to be selfish. I know you wish to see a little more of England: that is quite natural; and it would not be fair to hurry you away. I said so to him; and he agreed with me. He is not without his redeeming qualities, the ogre. He will not eat you; on the contrary, he will be kind to you, and will let you amuse yourself as much as you please. Only I think you would do well not to scowl at him, when you meet him. No, no; I will not hear any objections; it is all settled. Amuse yourself well, *ma petite*, and do not forget your poor Varinka, who will be very solitary without you, all these weeks."

And so the Princess betook herself to her bed, soothed, no doubt, by a comfortable sense of self-approval in that she had done what in her lay towards the promotion of a friendly feeling between the father and daughter. That she had not represented the facts of the case quite correctly is not at all likely to have troubled her. Claud, who took a broad, philosophical view of human nature, used often to say that Varinka was physically incapable of telling the truth, and that it would be as unreasonable to quarrel with her for lying as to blame a blind man for running up against you in the street.

Just before the departure of the up-express, two days later, the station-master, the three porters, and the knot of loungers who are generally to be seen congregated round the bookstall at the Beachborough station during the summer months, were privileged to behold a really touching scene. A lady of diminutive stature, dressed in the neatest of gray traveling costumes, was standing beside the door of the compartment reserved for her, alternately pressing her handkerchief to her eyes and raising herself on tiptoe to embrace a tall, dark-haired girl,

whose features seemed to express mingled sorrow and remorse A young gentleman of considerable personal attractions, a footman bearing rugs and umbrellas, and a lady's-maid with a dressing-case, held themselves a few paces aloof, as if unwilling to intrude upon this painful leave-taking. Not until the bell had rung, and all the other passengers were in their places, could the two ladies be induced to let one another go. The guard, respectfully addressing the elder of them as "Yer 'ighness," was compelled to inform her twice that she was keeping everybody waiting, and finally to have recourse to a gentle movement of compulsion, before he could sound his whistle, and start the train.

The emotions of the great seldom fail to obtain interest and sympathy, and, even before the station-master had disclosed the rank of the illustrious traveler, it was felt to be highly creditable to the occupant of a reserved compartment that she should weep like any common person.

"The Princess of Youramuff in Germany," said the obsequious official, in answer to several inquiries. "Married to Mr. Gervis, of Southlands. Her 'ighness proceeds to Dover to-day, *ong route* for the continent. Please to stand o' one side for a moment, ma'am, and allow the young lady to pass."

The great Lord Courtney himself could hardly have commanded more reverence than did Geneviève, as, with downcast eyes, she passed out to her carriage. For how can we simple Lynshire folks be expected to know that there exist nations so inconsequent as to designate the least important among their nobility by the proud title of prince?

Geneviève was much ashamed of herself. She had allowed Varinka to depart far too easily, she thought; she had been too much influenced by her own desire to remain on for a few weeks in England—a desire for which, now that she came to reflect upon it, she could discover no warrant at all.

"I wish I had insisted upon going with her," she exclaimed aloud, at last, as a picture of the deserted one pacing sadly along the Trouville sands rose before her mental vision.

"How could you, when she insisted upon going without you?" asked Claud, looking down from the driving-seat of the mail-phaeton which he was piloting, with more dash than caution, through the back streets of Beachborough. "At all events," he added, "she is off now, and we can't very well pursue her; so the best thing you can do is to try and enjoy yourself. It would be most ungrateful to allow poor Varinka's feelings to be lacerated in this distressing way for nothing—don't you see? Let us make an effort."

Geneviève smiled, conscious that it was only by an effort

that she was able to refrain from enjoying herself already. Was not the mere fact of being whirled through the summer air at a speed of twelve miles an hour enough to raise any one's spirits? The pleasant, prosperous English landscape, with its trim hedgerows, its fields of wheat and barley bending under the breeze, its bright green foregrounds and hazy blue distances; the chorus of birds twittering in every tree and bush; the cattle standing up to their knees in shady pools; the fragrance of honeysuckle wreaths in deep lanes—all these moved with a new and soft delight the senses of a city-bred maiden; and if she did not fully share her brother's anticipations of pleasure at the prospect of lawn-tennis in Miss Flemyng's company, her cry of admiration was not less genuine than his, when a turn of the road brought them in sight of the old red house in which that hospitable young lady's childhood and youth had been passed.

"What a lovely place!" she exclaimed. "There can be nothing like that out of England."

"It is a beautiful old house," said Claud. "Picturesque, romantic-looking; but quite homely, all the same. The sort of house that could only be inhabited by people of a certain refinement. Just the sort of house which I should have imagined Miss Flemyng living in."

"Should you really?" Geneviève said, her enthusiasm cooling a little. "That only shows what different impressions the same person may make upon different people. I should have connected her with a bright, white Italian villa, full of mirrors and handsome furniture and bric-a-brac."

"Why?" asked Claud, surprised.

And the only reply that Geneviève could make was, "I don't know why; but I should."

CHAPTER VIII.

AT THE MOATED HOUSE.

IF the Moated House was especially adapted for the honor of sheltering the Flemyng family, it had waited many years and passed through many hands before falling to its rightful tenants. Lynshire, taken as a whole, is not a county given to changes. We speak with a certain contempt in our parts of those neighborhoods nearer London where properties are constantly being let or sold, and are accustomed to boast that from time immemorial there has been a Croft at Croft Manor, a Knowles at Stone Hall, a Pilkington at Somerley, and

so on, through a respectable list of country gentlemen great and small. But there are some houses which, for no apparent reason, seem destined to vicissitudes, and the Moated House has been one of these. Tradition has it that, from the day of its foundation, it has never seen two generations of owners bearing the same name; and it is certain that, during the last two hundred years (which should be about the age of the house as it now stands), it has harbored half a dozen different families, all of whom have left their mark upon it in one way or another, but have failed to take root within its walls. It occupies the site of a fine old feudal castle; but nothing now remains to recall this ancient structure, save a ruined keep, and the dried-up moat which gives its name to the present building; while, as for the broad lands that lay about it, they have dropped gradually away, with the constant change of proprietors, and are now only a memory. I myself can just remember Mr. Flemyng's purchase of the estate, which at that time had shrunk to the house and the park, comprising some forty acres of land in all. People said he got the place cheap; and so perhaps he did, if value may be measured by an æsthetic standard; for the park, though small, boasts of as fine elms and limes as are to be seen anywhere in the country, and the old gabled house itself is well placed upon a slight elevation, the circle of its moat clearly defined around it, and its rich red-brick wall, partly hidden by ivy and climbing roses and jasmine, rising from amidst a blaze of flowers.

These flowers are Mr. Flemyng's especial hobby. Horticulture—so some people say—is the only one of his numerous whims upon which he has brought knowledge, as well as self-confidence, to bear; he has devoted infinite pains, and also, probably, more money than he could easily afford, to the gratifying of it; and the result has been an undeniable success. Old Colonel Gervis of Southlands, who rode the same hobby on a far more extensive and expensive scale, always admitted, I believe, that his garden was no match for his neighbor's. The lay of the land was less favorable to him. With greater space at command, he could not produce the effect of the gorgeous masses of color which surrounded the Moated House; nor has Southlands any such turf to show as that on which—the fullness of time being come—a lawn-tennis court had now been marked out, and which was unhappily beginning to be worn bare in certain places by the feet of the servers.

At the sound of carriage-wheels thundering on the wooden bridge which spans the moat, four little rough-headed boys came running out from behind a clump of evergreens, and stopped short, in various attitudes indicating distrust, on find

ing themselves face to face with a strange lady and gentleman. Claud, by way of opening the acquaintance, in a playful manner shook his whip at them; whereupon the eldest, a stolid urchin of ten or thereabouts, promptly picked up a large clod of earth from one of the adjacent flower-beds. He did not proceed to launch this missile, but merely held it in his hand in obvious readiness for possible emergencies, while his younger brothers grouped themselves behind him. Claud laughed, and the phalanx of young gentlemen responded by a unanimous frown. Relations between the parties were showing symptoms of becoming a trifle strained, when Miss Flemyng, looking very pretty in a perfectly fitting costume of white flannel, appeared upon the scene, and dispersed the small fry with a backward sweep of her sunshade.

"Go away, all of you," she cried. "Go quite away, and don't let yourselves be seen again till tea-time. How very kind of you to come, Miss Gervis! This is not a formal visit, is it? You don't want to be received in the drawing-room? Then we will go and sit under the cedar-tree, and they can bring us out tea presently. I asked some people to make up a game of lawn-tennis this afternoon; but they can't come. I am so sorry!"

"Don't be sorry on my account," said Geneviève. "I could not have played. I have never even seen the game yet."

"Oh, you would soon learn. All you have to do is to hit the ball over the net, you know. I would give you a lesson, if you liked; only perhaps you would find it rather too hot for a single game. I don't know what it is to be too hot myself."

Indeed she looked as if she could never be over-heated, or flushed, or disheveled. Geneviève, scanning her with a Frenchwoman's eye for details, noticed the absolute accuracy and finish of her costume. From crown to sole there was nothing wanting, nothing awry. Her complexion, which was that of the fairest of brunettes, had the clear glow of perfect health; her movements had the grace and freedom which only constant exercise can bestow. Geneviève remembered that Freddy Croft had once described Miss Flemyng as looking like a thoroughbred in tip-top condition, and she was struck now with the aptness of the comparison, which at the time had seemed to her a trifle coarse, as applied to a lady.

The two girls seated themselves under a spreading cedar-tree. There were wicker-chairs, comfortably cushioned, waiting for them there; a hammock was slung between two overarching boughs; some newspapers and a novel lay upon the grass. Looking out from that deep, cool shade, the eye rested contentedly upon brilliant masses of geraniums and petunias

and zinnias, upon butterflies hovering over them in the bright sunshine, and upon the old red house, with its mantle of creepers, beyond.

"How lovely it all is!" exclaimed Geneviève. "You must be very happy, living in such a beautiful place."

"It is well enough in summer," answered the other; "but even then it is not always fine weather in this country, unfortunately. Still there are worse places than this to lie down and dream in on hot afternoons. I am glad you like it; because perhaps you will often be tempted to come and see me now."

Evidently Miss Flemyng intended to be very friendly. Geneviève exerted herself to respond, wondering a little within herself, the while, why it was that she should find responsiveness an exertion.

Presently the youngest of the small boys who had been so summarily dismissed a quarter of an hour before came toddling across the lawn, and planted himself in front of his sister, with his blue eyes and his rosy mouth very wide open. News of importance seemed to be struggling vainly for utterance through his lips, and heralded its advent by sundry abortive gasps.

"Well, Tommy," said Miss Flemyng, "what is the matter now?"

"Oh, Nina, Jacky *is* such a naughty boy!"

"Well, my dear child, I can't help it. So are you a naughty boy, as far as that goes. You ought not to tell tales."

"But, Nina, he's putting a side-saddle on one of the cows, and he's going to ride her round the orchard, he says."

"I think I can trust the cow to put a stop to that little plan."

"But, Nina, he's got your new habit on, and he's—"

"Wretched child! why could you not have told me that sooner? Run off as fast as you can, and tell Jack that, if he doesn't take that habit off instantly and carry it up to my room, he will be put to bed at six o'clock for a fortnight. But of course he won't listen to you. Miss Gervis, will you excuse me for a few minutes? I am afraid I must go and see after these terrible children myself."

"Shall I go?" suggested Claud, rising from the low chair in which he had been seated. "I will undertake to reduce your rebels to order in a very few minutes, and it will be a great pleasure to me to save you a walk in this broiling sun."

"Oh, would you? How more than good of you! Some day I will do as much for you perhaps. But you must be prepared for all kinds of indignities. I warn you that these children are known far and wide for their utter want of manners and reverence."

"I am not afraid," answered Claud, laughing. "Come along, Tommy, and show me the way."

Geneviève could not help noticing the change that had taken place in Miss Flemyng's demeanor and intonation during the above short colloquy. Her manner had been friendly from the first—now it was something more; though in what the change consisted it was not so easy to specify. Upon more mature acquaintance with her new friend, Geneviève learned to look for this undefinable transformation whenever Miss Flemyng had occasion to speak to a man. She discovered, in short, that the young lady had one voice at the service of her own sex, and another at that of the opposite. The phenomenon is hardly a very remarkable one in itself, nor can it be said to be in any way the peculiar attribute of Miss Flemyng; but upon the present occasion it was rendered somewhat specially noticeable owing to the fact that, up to the moment of Claud's good-natured offer, she had not seen fit to address him at all. It is possible that this neglect may not have been wholly unintentional. It is possible, also—for she was well versed in the manners and moods of men—that Miss Flemyng may have expected the young fellow to be a little huffed by so protracted a disregard of his presence. But if she had formed any such anticipation, her prescience was at fault. Claud was neither shy nor vain, and his temperament disposed him towards a quiet contemplation of all pleasing objects. He had been perfectly contented to sit in the shade, and watch his pretty hostess, and would have been contented so to sit for another half-hour or more, if circumstances had not brought about an interruption. He admired Miss Flemyng excessively. He was not in love with her; but perhaps he was going to be. The possibility had just suggested itself to him—nothing more—and, so far as it had gone, the sensation was a sufficiently agreeable one. It stimulated interest without disturbing the mental balance, and was as yet far too vague to demand self-examination.

When, after a tolerably long interval, he returned with the four little boys hanging about different parts of his person, he found the two ladies seated beside a low table, on which stood a tea-tray and cups, and some dishes of piled-up fruit. Miss Flemyng turned round with a laugh and a shrug of her shoulders, as she looked at his escort.

"I told you how it would be," said she. "In spite of my warnings, you have chosen to make friends with those unprincipled children, and now there will be no more peace for you in this house."

"But I like it," said Claud.

She shrugged her shoulders again. "Every one to his taste! And what about my riding-habit, if you please?"

"I am happy to be able to announce to you that it is uninjured. An indignant young woman, whom I presumed to be your maid, was carrying it off triumphantly when I arrived upon the scene. But Jack tells me that the whole scheme would have had to be abandoned in any case, owing, as you anticipated, to insuperable objections on the part of the cow."

The boys had grouped themselves round Geneviève now, and one of them had already possessed himself of her parasol.

"Are you, too, fond of children, Miss Gervis?" Nina inquired. And this time it was Claud who detected that slight alteration of accent.

"When they are good," answered Geneviève judiciously.

"Gen can always make them good," Claud remarked. "It is her speciality."

He had picked up a tennis-racquet from the grass, and was making cuts at imaginary balls.

"Are you a great hand at this game?" he asked of his neighbor.

"Well—I am middling. I can hold my own with any woman I have ever met. What are you like yourself?"

"Oh, I am bad. I never practice."

"Then we will have a match for a pair of gloves some day."

"I wish you would have it now," said Geneviève. "I should like so much to see you play." And then, as Miss Flemyng hesitated a little, "Please don't think of standing on ceremony with me," she added; "the children will entertain me, if I want any other entertainment than looking on."

Nina waited for no further persuasion. Perhaps she felt that she had already done her best to amuse her visitor, and could do little more, so far as conversation went.

If Geneviève did not enjoy watching Miss Flemyng playing lawn-tennis, it can only have been because she lacked artistic education. No eye trained to appreciate loveliness of line and contour could have failed to derive supreme satisfaction from the sight of that lissom figure thrown by the return of the flying ball into a hundred different postures, each a study for a sculptor and all as natural as the movements of a savage. Perhaps the fact that this young female athlete had nothing rustic about her, but was arrayed in accordance with the latest degrees of fashion, may have added a charm to the exhibition. Claud was enchanted;—so much so that he allowed his opponent to win the first game with ridiculous ease. Then he began to exert himself a little more. With his superiority of reach and

his knowledge of racquets, he ought, he imagined, to have little difficulty in winning the match, if so minded. Miss Flemyng's play improved, however, in equal measure with his own, and the second game was added to her score. The next three went the same way. Do what he would, Claud could not put the ball away from his active little adversary; and the annoying part of it was that, whereas he was becoming very hot and rather short of breath, she was taking it all as coolly as you please, scarcely running at all, and seeming to know by instinct where the ball would pitch. At last, when she had scored the final ace of the sixth game by a brilliant backhanded half-volley, Claud threw down his racquet with a gesture of despair.

"That will do," he said. "I am not going to make myself ridiculous any longer. And I will not venture to play with you again till I have taken some lessons. Why didn't you tell me you were a professional? If you would at least confess that you are tired, it would soothe my wounded vanity a little."

"I am not a bit tired," answered Miss Flemyng. "We will play the rubber out, if you like."

"Heaven forbid! I don't in the least mind admitting that *I* am tired; and I want to sit in the shade, and rest."

"Well, perhaps it would be pleasanter," said Miss Flemyng. "What has become of your sister?"

"She has gone off somewhere with the children. I saw them leading her away captive some time ago. You need not feel anxious about her; she is sure to be perfectly happy with them."

"Do you think so?"

Nina was lying back, half in, half out of the net hammock, one little foot swinging lazily to and fro an inch or two above the ground. She had placed her right hand under her head, and was staring up at the spaces of blue sky that showed between the cedar branches, while with her left she lifted a cherry, every now and again, and let it drop into her mouth.

"I was quite right about her," she remarked, after a pause.

"How?"

"I told you the other day, you know, that probably she would not like me. And she doesn't."

"What makes you think that? I am sure you are wrong. Gen is not demonstrative; she takes a long time to make up her mind about people—"

"She has made up her mind about me. And it is a pity; because I like her immensely. She is my ideal of a woman. That kind of woman whom I should adore, if I were a man. She has a beautiful face, do you know. Not beautiful in the way of features; but one can see that there is a soul behind it.

I am convinced that she has a soul; and that is what interests me. I myself have no soul at all. I have a heart—more or less of one—but absolutely no soul—I haven't really."

All this was said half absently, in brief sentences, with a pause between each; and the general effect was rather that of a soliloquy than of a tribute to conversation.

Claud said nothing. He was absorbed in contemplation of the picture before him, and for the moment it seemed a matter of no importance at all whether the utterances that fell from those perfect lips were nonsense or not. Presently Nina resumed:—

"The worst of making friends with women is that one has to waste so much time over it. Life is too short for all that preliminary humbug; and they won't let you off a syllable of it. Of course, if one sees a prospect of friendship beyond, one wades on with as good a grace as one can; but if one does not, it is best to give the whole thing up; don't you think so? I am afraid I shall have to give your sister up."

"I hope you won't," said Claud.

"Oh, I only mean it in a certain sense. Now with men, if they are at all decent sort of people, there is no trouble of that kind. I always feel that I can safely say to them, 'We get on well together; some day we shall probably be friends. Suppose we skip the introductory chapters, and assume that we have known one another for years. Won't that save both of us a great deal of unnecessary boredom?"

"And do they generally agree?"

"Nine out of ten of them do most cordially, and begin telling me their secrets at once. A man is always dying to talk about himself."

"And the tenth?"

"The tenth is generally an unbearable prig. I do trust you don't say that because you intend to be the exception yourself."

"I don't know," said Claud. "I am afraid I have no secrets to tell."

"Well, but you have ambitions, ideas, an object in life—something."

"Perhaps; but all those things would not interest you?"

"Of course they would interest me. They are the very things that do interest me. Please begin?"

"I would so very much rather hear you talk about yourself."

"I *have* been talking about myself, haven't I? I have been endeavoring to give you an insight into my character."

"But you have said nothing about your own ambitions, and object in life, and so forth."

"I have no ambitions that I know of, except the ambition

that everybody has to get hold of money somehow or other. My chief object in life is to get as much amusement out of it as I can. Now are you satisfied?"

"Not at all," answered Claud. "If you will pardon my saying so, I don't believe you have described yourself quite truly."

"I assure you I have. There is no use in trying to represent one's self as better than one is, because one is certain to be found out sooner or later. I am good-natured, because I was born so; but I don't feel the smallest vocation to benefit my species. I should never go out of my way to do any good to anybody, and I should certainly make myself very disagreeable to anybody who interfered with my tastes."

"Might one make so bold as to ask what your tastes are?"

"Certainly. I like hunting, and I like dancing, and I like plenty of new clothes; and there is another thing that I like better than all; only, if I call it by its true name, I shall shock you."

"Never mind. I should like to hear it truthfully described."

"Flirting, then. Now you are shocked. You are more than shocked; you are scandalized. You are saying to yourself that I am a very vulgar girl."

"No one could by any possibility say that of you, Miss Flemyng."

"Ah, you are less truthful than I am, I see. And the amusing thing is that there never lived a woman yet, good or bad, that did not enjoy flirting. Still, one ought not to set people's nerves on edge by calling a spade a spade. I knew I should shock you."

"But really, Miss Flemyng, I am not so easily shocked as you think."

"And really, Mr. Gervis, I don't care a—a cherry-stone whether you are shocked or not."

Claud laughed. "Do you know," said he, "I suspect that if we go on talking in this way much longer, we shall begin to fight?"

Nina slid down from the hammock on to her feet, stretched herself, yawned, and rubbed her eyes with the backs of her hands; and never was an ungainly attitude assumed with more exquisite grace.

"I believe the sun has been getting into my brains and making me silly," she remarked. "Or is it the effect of your company, do you think? Anyhow, we have got to know one another better by my talking a little nonsense, and the next time we meet, it will be your turn. Here comes your sister, accompanied by a dismounted cavalier, leading his horse."

And something in this spectacle apparently tickled Miss

Flemyng's sense of the ludicrous, for her shoulders shook with silent laughter.

"It is only Freddy Croft," said Claud, raising himself upon his elbow, and following the direction of her glance. "Why do you laugh?"

But Nina returned no answer; unless a slight increase of merriment could be taken as such. She had not yet recovered herself when the approaching couple came within speaking distance; and Freddy's expressive features immediately put on a sympathetic grin. He had ridden over to Southlands, it appeared, bearing a note of invitation, and, in consequence of information received there, had taken the Moated House on his way back.

"I say, Gervis, you are all coming over to stay with us next week," he announced. "We must introduce your sister to the noble game of cricket; and Mr. Gervis will meet lots of people who knew him before the flood."

"The governor!—is he coming too?" ejaculated Claud, looking rather taken aback.

"I should just think he was. I saw him over at your place just now, and I told him there would be some other old boys for him to walk about with and talk to, and that sort of thing; so he said that would do him down to the ground. If only the weather holds up, we'll have a regular jolly week. Miss Flemyng is coming, of course."

"Not unless she is asked," put in that young lady quietly.

"Asked! Why, my mother asked you weeks ago."

"Did she? I had forgotten all about it."

For some reason or other, Nina had suddenly become grave and subdued. After this, she addressed her conversation exclusively to Geneviève, and bade Claud good-by, when the time came, in an absent, perfunctory manner, as if she were hardly aware of his existence.

He thought a good deal about her on the way home; but did not communicate the subject of his thoughts to his sister. He was fascinated and a little puzzled, but upon the whole not quite so well pleased as he had expected to be. Perhaps, after all, there was, as she herself had hinted, a tinge of vulgarity in her affectation of excessive plain speaking; and, all things considered, the only decided sentiment with regard to Miss Flemyng that he could as yet find in his heart was a profound admiration for her physical charms. So much the better for his peace of mind, thought he.

CHAPTER IX.

AT CROFT MANOR.

CROFT MANOR has ever borne a social character singularly out of keeping with the solid, stolid respectability of its exterior. To look at the house standing, huge, square and uncompromising, in the midst of its wide park, without a flower-bed near it, and with the extensive stabling of the establishment unconcealed by any screen of trees or shrubs, you would have set it down as the home of a line of wealthy squires addicted, probably, to farming and field sports, attending church regularly on Sunday mornings and going to bed every night at half-past ten. But in truth Croft has never owned any such worthy lords as these. Its masters have been for the most part a roistering lot of rakes and spendthrifts, with here and there, if report speaks truly, a rogue among them.

Not to go so far back as the brawling, dicing baronets of the last century, it is within my own recollection that people used to shake their heads when Sir Montagu Croft's name was mentioned, and that there were doings at the Manor, in his time, which Hicks, my grandmother's butler, used to speak of with suppressed glee as "the dooce's own delight," but as to the precise nature of which he declined to satisfy my youthful curiosity. Later in life, when my interest in this awful and wicked personage was no longer so keen, I of course heard all about him. He seems to have had a fine capacity for every form of vice, with a preference for those which entail the largest expenditure of cash; and no doubt he would have gone straight to the dogs, dragging his property after him, had he not very considerately broken his neck one day shortly after the birth of his heir. But for this accident our friend Freddy would hardly have found himself in his present comfortable circumstances when, after a long minority, he entered upon his inheritance.

Since that day the Manor, which had been closed for many years, and for many more inhabited chiefly by Lady Croft's sober old friends, has, it must be confessed, regained something of its former notoriety. It has once more come to be known as a "fast" house, though with the modified signification attached to that word in these more healthy times. A man may stay there nowadays without fear of being expected to dispose of three bottles of port at a sitting, or to stake all

his worldly goods upon a cast of the dice; but, on the other hand, he must be prepared to swallow more champagne and brandy-and-soda than he wants; he must not object to play poker or Napoleon half the night through, nor must he be surprised if he is dragged out of bed in the small hours of the morning and forcibly tossed in a blanket by half a dozen of his light-hearted companions. Those who do not find these pastimes attractive are best away from Croft Manor; and that there are a good many such persons is sufficiently evidenced by the fact that its rooms are rarely tenanted, save by members of a certain set. Quiet, nervous and irritable men, give the place a wide berth, and those who, for the sake of their long-standing friendship with Lady Croft, consent to visit her occasionally, as of old, usually find some excuse for cutting their stay short—thereby greatly surprising their genial host, who cannot at all understand why they should be in such a hurry to be off, when he and his friends have taken so much trouble to make the house lively and agreeable for them.

To do Freddy justice, it is not in his nature to willingly hurt or offend anybody; and if he were left to himself, his pranks would be reserved for his own intimates. It was not he who put a couple of live frogs into poor Miss Pennefather's boots; it was not he who took advantage of the drowsiness which sometimes affects a gentleman who shall be nameless to brutally singe that gentleman's hair and beard; nor was it he, again, who, when the Croft fire-engine was being exhibited to the lord-lieutenant of the county, caused the hose to be pointed full at that venerable nobleman's upturned face—an offense, by the way, which his lordship has never pardoned, and never will pardon. He got the credit of these and numberless other escapades of which the talented originator was Lord Lynchester; and the truth is that when that ornament to the peerage enters a house, the sooner all decent people escape from it the better for them. I speak without bitterness of feeling, and I am not, I hope, vindictive; but if every one of Lord Lynchester's merry jests should prove the means of bringing him within reach of the arm of the law, I know who will be there to have a look at him in the dock.

He is not, I believe, very fond of staying in other people's houses, and Croft Manor, as a general thing sees him only once a year; but on that occasion—during the week, namely, which of late years had been devoted to the decision of a series of county cricket matches on Freddy's ground—he seldom fails to keep his engagement; for he has an erroneous notion that he can play the game.

Our friends from Southlands arrived on the evening of the

day for which they had been invited, and entered the drawing-room, before dinner, simultaneously with Lord Lynchester, who had been cricketing all day, and having failed to score in his first innings, was in an exceedingly bad temper. Lady Croft, who had not yet had an opportunity of shaking hands with her son's guest, and who was mortally afraid of the man, rose to welcome him with her nervous company-smile.

"So glad you were able to come. So sorry Lady Lynchester could not come with you. Where is she now?"

"Haven't the ghost of an idea," answered his lordship curtly, and whisking round, presented his hostess with a fine view of his back. He stood with his hands in his pockets, swaying slowly from his heels to his toes, and surveying the assembled company with a steady frown. He was a tall, thin man, with a small head well set on his shoulders, black hair turning gray at the temples and a slight waxed mustache. It was a handsome face, but an eminently disagreeable one, and no one could wonder that Lady Lynchester should flee from before it whenever she got the chance.

There were some thirty people sitting and standing in different parts of the long room, of whom it was easy to see that at least two-thirds had been invited by the master of the house, and the remainder by his mother. The latter, a dignified little *coterie* of gray-headed ladies and gentlemen, were gathered together in the neighborhood of Lady Croft's arm-chair, which from long-established custom stood at all seasons close to the fireside, while the younger and livelier guests were assembled near the distant bay-window in which Miss Croft's tall figure was a prominent object. The two divisions appeared to have formed themselves instinctively into separate camps, as if in mute protest against the possibility of crabbed age and youth dwelling together. Midway in the intervening space sat Nina Flemyng, stroking the head of a shaggy deerhound, and conversing in an undertone with a six-foot admirer, who was bending uncomfortably over her. There were only eight ladies present, all told.

Geneviève took note of these and other details from the corner in which she had modestly established herself, while her father was listening to Lady Croft's plaintive murmurings with that odd, unfathomable air of his, in which courtesy, deference and weariness all had a part, and which sometimes gave him a fugitive resemblance to the late Emperor of the French. She was wondering where Freddy could have concealed himself when the subject of her speculations bustled in, his face red and shining from the combined effects of sun and

cold water, his smoothly-brushed hair still damp, and his fingers struggling with a refractory sleeve-link, which had evidently been thrust into its place on his way down-stairs. Freddy has often been heard to boast that he can dress for dinner in a trifle under the five minutes. A hasty glance round the room revealed to him Geneviève's whereabouts, and she was immediately saluted by one of those numbing grips of the hand which are the Englishman's equivalent for a whole page of fine phrases.

"Well, Miss Gervis, so you've found your way here all right, eh? Hideous old shop, ain't it? But there's plenty of room in it, that's one thing, and it grows upon you, I think. I hope you'll find it do so. I say, where's my friend Miss Potts?"

"She was not invited," answered Geneviève, smiling.

"Bless me! How awfully stupid! I'll tell my mother to write a line to-night, and ask her to come over to-morrow."

"Oh, no, you must not do that," Geneviève said. "She would not care to come, and perhaps—" Here she glanced for a moment at Mr. Gervis, and left her sentence unfinished. "But it is very kind of you to have thought of her," she resumed, "and she will be pleased when I tell her."

"Why kind? I wanted to see her," Freddy said simply. "Miss Potts and I always got on together first-rate. We will talk it over afterwards. I must go and look after some of these people now; I'm afraid I'm awfully late."

Freddy hurried away to attend to his duties as host, and soon returned, bringing with him a stout, middle-aged gentleman, whom he introduced to Geneviève as Colonel Finch, remarking at the same time, in a perfectly audible aside, that he was a cheery old chap, who would keep her amused all through dinner, and talk nineteen to the dozen.

"I will do my best to deserve my character, Miss Gervis," Colonel Finch remarked, not at all disconcerted, as he led his partner towards the dining-room, and indeed Geneviève found him a sufficiently entertaining neighbor.

"This is the first time you have staid here, I suppose," he began. "Yes. Queer house—very queer house—yes. The kindest-hearted people that ever breathed; let you do exactly as you like, and do anything for you; but noisy, uncommonly noisy. Bear-fighting, you know, and practical jokes, and all that sort of thing—yes. Know Miss Croft at all? H'm! Last time I was here, she came into the smoking-room, with a big cigar in her mouth, after the others had gone to bed, sat up till morning, playing loo with some of the young fellows, and finished up by backing herself to jump over a chair standing. Did it too. You don't smoke, eh? Glad to hear it. Between

you and me, I think ladies are a little bit out of place in a smoking-room—what? I'm getting old, you see—too old for this house. Fact is, I shouldn't have come here at all, if I had known I was going to meet Lynchester. Nasty-tempered fellow, that. Doesn't mind how far he goes with other people, and won't stand much retaliation. Chances are they will have some deuced unpleasant row with him one of these days—yes. Oh, he looks quiet enough now; but that's because he is sitting between two old ladies, and he's in the sulks too, they tell me. Later in the evening, you'll see—or rather, I hope you won't see. Dare say you'll hear, though—what?"

The worthy colonel continued in this strain, without intermission, *ab ovo usque ad mala*, saving Geneviève all trouble in the way of searching for subjects of conversation, and giving her a good deal of information as to the characters and habits of the neighborhood in short, disjointed sentences, each of which was punctuated by a muttered "Yes" or a "What?" He was fond of talking, and his hearer had a preference for listening; so that they suited each other as well as Jack Sprat and his wife are said to have done, and parted with mutual regret when Lady Croft gave the signal for the ladies to move.

Geneviève, for her part, longed to have her loquacious old friend back when she found herself in the drawing-room, seated beside an equally talkative, but infinitely less agreeable lady, who cross-questioned her as to the history of her past life, and asked point-blank why her father and his wife lived apart. But this martyrdom, which Geneviève, in her ignorance of British customs, had feared might be prolonged for hours, did not last quite twenty minutes; at the expiration of which time the appearance of a few black coats in the doorway brought release to more than one sufferer. It was only a small body of men who showed themselves. The remainder, it appeared, were getting up a pool in the billiard-room, whither some of the ladies, among whom were Miss Croft and Nina Flemyng, presently went down to join them.

Almost immediately afterwards, Geneviève was startled by a slight movement behind her, and turning round, discovered Freddy standing grinning at her elbow.

"Don't be alarmed," said he; "it's only me. I just waited to see half of those people down-stairs started at a round game and the other half at pool, and then I nipped off, and came in through that door at the other end of the room. Now we have got rid of the lot of them, thank goodness! and we'll have some music, if you don't mind by and by. You haven't been so cruel as to leave the violin behind you, as well as Miss Potts, I hope."

"Oh, but indeed I have," answered Geneviève. "Most

likely your friends would have thought me very cruel if I had brought it."

Freddy groaned. "Well, really this is too bad! Do you know, I have been looking forward to this moment ever since I got up this morning, and all day long I have been wondering how I should manage to get you up here away from those fellows, and whether perhaps you wouldn't want to play pool, or something; and now that I've worked it all so beautifully—"

"You find that you are reduced to having to talk to me, instead of hearing me play the violin. I am very sorry. Can't you go down-stairs again?"

"Now, Miss Gervis, you know I didn't mean that," exclaimed Freddy, calling up into his blue eyes an expression intended to convey mild reproach and a great many other things less easily indicated. "You know there is nothing in all the world that I would rather do than talk to you."

This was our young friend's method of paying his addresses. Like everything else that he put his hand to, he did it thoroughly. "Only, you see," he went on after a pause, "I always think of you with your violin, somehow: it seems like a part of you. I'll tell you what I'll do; I'll send a trap over to Southlands to-morrow morning, and it shall bring back Miss Potts and the violin together."

Geneviève did not answer for a moment. When she did, there was a certain soft vibration in her voice which Freddy had never detected there before.

"Thank you very much indeed," she said; "but I am afraid Miss Potts could not come. I should have to ask permission for her; and I—I would rather not do that. But you have no idea how pleased she will be when she hears that you wanted her. It is so very seldom that any one shows her the smallest attention; though there are plenty of people who make use of her when it suits them. I don't think I ever met any one so kind as you are."

Freddy stared in sheer amazement, while his heart—which, to be sure, was a very soft one—became filled with a sort of indignant pity. All this gratitude for a simple piece of careless good nature! What could the poor girl's life have been? Among what monsters of selfishness could she have lived, that she should be so touched by such a trifle? He looked across the room at Mr. Gervis, who was reclining placidly in an arm-chair beside a hook-nosed dowager, with a strong desire to seize that frail, delicate-looking old gentleman by the shoulders and ask him what the devil he meant by it. He did not understand—how should he, when the girl hardly suspected as much herself?—that her training had taught her to look for a

motive beneath every apparent act of kindness; nor had he discovered that her temperament was of that rather morbid description which submits more willingly to actual ill-treatment than to indifferent toleration, and is apt to be more moved by some chance evidence of disinterestedness than by years of steady, matter-of-course affection. Remembering, after a little further cogitation, what a real good fellow Claud was—all Freddy's friends and the greater part of his acquaintances were real good fellows—and that the father, likewise, was a civil-spoken old party, he came to the conclusion that Miss Gervis's sensibility could hardly, after all, be attributable to unhappiness at home, and must probably arise out of an exaggerated tenderness for the absent Potts. "Case of love me, love my dog," he thought; and straightway there arose in his imagination a vision of Miss Potts spending her declining years in peace and plenty at Croft Manor, treated as an old and valued friend by the lord thereof and his wife, and adored by their children, whom of course she would spoil abominably. It will be perceived that, in this instance at any rate, Freddy's love was not of that heedless kind which revels only in the joy of the passing moment, and takes no thought of eventualities.

At the same time, he did not flatter himself that the prize would be his whenever he pleased, and for the mere asking. He was a modest little fellow enough, and believing Geneviève to be immeasurably his superior, was prepared to give proof of infinite patience and devotion before he could hope that his love might be in any degree returned. And yet it is probable that he would have been the least bit in the world mortified if he could have read Miss Gervis's heart when he wished her good night, after a *tête-à-tête* of nearly two hours, and could have seen how little suspicion there was there of the tender sentiments which were agitating his own. Once, indeed, when Varinka's anxious suspicions had suggested that the young Englishman might have fallen in love with her, the notion, absurd as it was, had caused Geneviève a momentary vague tremor, in which, if she had analyzed it, she would have found that gratification had some small part; but this had been nothing more than a passing emotion, forgotten almost as soon as felt, and now she would have laughed at the idea that Freddy was less heart-whole than herself. In point of fact, she, like most other young women, had a masculine ideal, whose lot, in some far-away, misty future, might, if the fates were propitious, come to be linked with hers—a transcendent individual, towering mentally and corporeally far above the common herd—a poet possibly, or a musician, or an artist—a man to whose terrestrial wants it would be the privilege of love to minister—a man,

in short, utterly unlike anybody whom she had as yet encountered, and certainly most unlike this merry little grown-up schoolboy of an English baronet.

All this did not prevent her, however, from thinking very kindly of Freddy after she had reached her bedroom and was passing the events of the day in mental review. His honesty, his blunt directness of speech and the natural readiness with which all his thoughts rose to his lips, had an especial charm for her, whose youth had been passed in an atmosphere of artificiality, and whose nearest relations, being all in a false position with regard to one another, could seldom say what they thought, nor always think what they said. Here, in England, one seemed to breathe a purer air. There was less refinement, perhaps, but more humanity and more truth. The very freaks of this disorderly household, over which Colonel Finch had shaken his head, were in a manner creditable to their perpetrators; for surely men who could find amusement in behaving like mischievous children could have nothing very heavy upon their consciences; and was not a rough young Englishman, even if a trifle too much given to horse-play, a more wholesome and hopeful object to look upon than one of those pale Parisians who have no boyhood, and who learn to sneer at life before they have well entered upon it?

Geneviève, in a word, felt, for some reason or other, unusually light-hearted, and was disposed to view all her present surroundings through rose-colored spectacles. Even when, some hours later, she was roused from her sleep by the sound of flying footsteps in the corridor outside, followed by a heavy fall, shrieks, shouts of laughter, and cries of "Sit on his head!" "Give it him, Miss Croft!"—even then she felt no animosity against the nocturnal revelers who had disturbed her rest, and only congratulated herself upon having taken the precaution of locking her door before getting into bed.

In the same charitable frame of mind she went down, the next morning, to the breakfast-room, where she found a large gathering already assembled. There were no obsequious servants in the room, as there would have been in a French château under similar circumstances; each guest apparently looked after himself, some seated at the table, some standing by a sideboard, on which were hams and pies and sundry small decanters; there was a ceaseless clatter of plates and a confused hubbub of voices. Every one—not even excepting Lord Lynchester, who had already arrayed himself in white flannel trousers and a striped coat of many colors—seemed to be in the highest of spirits; and, to judge by the rapidity with which the young men were disposing of the viands before them, the

late hours of the previous night had affected no one's appetite. One of these youths exhibited a fine black eye; upon which subject a never-ending stream of facetious questions and remarks was being poured upon him from different quarters of the room. "Been playing cricket already this morning, Jones, and trying to catch the ball in your mouth, eh?"—"I say, Jones, you must get somebody to paint that eye of yours before you can show out of doors, you know. Perhaps the person who colored it for you would be so kind."—"What a quarrelsome fellow you must be, Jones. I'll swear you hadn't a black eye when you left the billiard-room last night."—"How did you manage it, Jones? Perhaps Miss Croft saw the accident happen; she went up at the same time as you did." And after each of these brilliant sallies arose a prolonged outburst of hilarity, while through it all Miss Croft, tall, fresh-colored and rather hard-featured, her well-developed figure showing to advantage in a dress fitting like a glove, sat eating her breakfast in demure imperturbability, but with a lurking triumph in the side-glances with which, every now and again, she favored the discomfited Jones. Geneviève understood but a small part of the by-play and the allusions, and was a little bewildered by the uproar; but there was something catching in this general exuberance and novel in the total freedom from restraint. Colonel Finch put her impressions into the vernacular when he remarked, in his semi-confidential way:—

"Free-and-easy lot, Miss Gervis; free-and-easy—yes. No starch, you know, no starch—what?"

Down at the cricket-ground, later, it was much the same scene over again. In the large tent, from which Freddy's guests were supposed to be watching the fortunes of the Croft Manor eleven, a table was spread, piled up with fruit and cakes and other more substantial refreshments; the champagne and claret-cup were consumed as fast as half a dozen servants could supply the glasses; there seemed to be no break in the eating and drinking. By and by carriages began to drive up over the grass, bringing spectators from the several houses of the neighborhood—thirsty souls all of them: for indeed it was a blazing summer's day, and there was scarcely breeze enough to stir the leaves of the old elms that formed a pleasant dark background to the smoothly-shaven cricket-field, with its players, in their white flannels, dotted here and there.

Freddy, standing behind Geneviève's chair, endeavored to enlighten her as to the mysteries of the game, and confided to her some of his troubles as captain of the county eleven, relating how, by dint of unwearied exertions, he had brought Lynshire back to its old place among the cricketing counties,

how he had organized this annual week as one means of securing a supply of fresh blood, how impossible it was to select a man without mortally offending a dozen others, how he had to bear the blame of every defeat and got small credit for any victory, and how he had often been more than half-inclined to throw the whole thing up, by George.

Meanwhile the Croft Manor score was mounting steadily, and the champagne was doing its work among the lookers-on. Every hit was rewarded by loud applause from the tent; and the comments which, from time to time, reached Geneviève's ears testified to the general good humor. Never was better cricket; never was such glorious weather; never was such a perfect ground. And so the day went merrily on, and morning passed into afternoon.

Only one incident occurred to mar the universal harmony. Lord Lynchester, having unfortunately returned his first ball into the hands of the bowler, came striding back to the tent in undisguised dudgeon, threw down his bat, and characterizing the entire proceedings as "utter skittles," declared his intention of hooking it out of this forthwith. Perhaps no one was very deeply distressed by this announcement, except Freddy, whose consternation was so evidently heartfelt that Geneviève felt quite sorry for him.

"Oh, I say, hang it all, Lyn!" he exclaimed; "you don't mean that surely. It would be too bad to go off just as everything is getting into swing. Better luck next time, you know. There are three more matches to come on."

But Lord Lynchester was inexorable. He didn't care twopence whether he scored or not, he said; but playing cricket with such a lot of duffers was rot, and he was going to catch the three o'clock train for Brighton. He marched off accordingly, without going through the formality of saying good-by to anybody.

Freddy stood reflectively rubbing his nose for a minute or two, and then turned to Claud Gervis, who was sitting on a bench by himself, watching the cricket with a rather melancholy and preoccupied air.

"Now, old man," said he, "here's your chance. Take Lynchester's place in the field to-day, and I'll promise you an innings to-morrow. We shall play the match out."

"My dear fellow," said Claud, "I haven't had a bat in my hand six times since I left school, and I was a regular muff, you know, even then. Oh no; I shall want a great deal of private instruction before you see me playing in public."

"Good gracious! you don't call this playing in public, do you? Everybody plays here; it's only for the fun of the thing.

I'll bet you know more about the game than lots of these chaps who think they ought to be playing for the county; and besides, I want to see what you can do. Who knows but we may make a player out of you! Haven't got any flannels? Oh, if that's all, I'll undertake to rig you out in something. Come up to the house, and we'll soon arrange that little difficulty."

Claud resisted a little longer, for form's sake; but he allowed himself to be persuaded without much additional pressure, being indeed only too eager to accept this, or any other means offered to him of occupying himself, and getting through the time which had begun to hang rather heavily upon his hands. The truth is that our hero was not enjoying himself at all. Thrown among a number of young men of his own age, all of whom were strangers to him, while all were upon the most intimate terms with one another, he had been made to feel rather uncomfortably his position as an outsider. The years that had elapsed since his school days, and which he had employed in making himself acquainted with the cities and manners of many nations, had opened a chasm between him and the young fellows of his own standing, who, during the same time, had been tranquilly pursuing the ordinary course of an English gentleman's training. He felt himself older than they, and was conscious of his inability to take up the thread of his companionship with them where he had dropped it. He could not at once fall into their ways of thought and tricks of speech, nor had the obstreperous gayety of the previous night recommended itself to him by any means as favorably as it had done to his sister. The ceaseless practical jokes had failed to amuse him; the rowdiness and vulgarity of the whole business had bored and disgusted him, and of Miss Croft with her loud voice and her masculine ways, he had conceived a holy horror. Moreover, Miss Flemyng had seen fit to bear herself towards him in a singular and inexplicable manner. A nod and a smile from the other side of the dinner-table, and a few polite, but meaningless commonplaces addressed to him at intervals, during the game of pool which had occupied the best part of the evening, had been all that he had been able to obtain by way of recognition from that capricious young lady. Not a word of that friendship which had been inaugurated in so off-hand a manner only a few days before; not a hint at the renewal of those pleasant confidences which had been begun under the cedar-tree. The Nina of the Moated House, in truth, was an altogether different person from the Miss Flemyng of Croft Manor, who, though perfectly at her ease and at home with those about her, seemed determined to make them understand that, whatever others

might do, she at least had no intention of abrogating the rights of her sex and station, or of permitting the jocular familiarities encouraged by her friend Miss Croft. All this was quite as it should be, and one could understand that some reserve of attitude might be requisite in so irreverent a household; but it was quite another thing to hold sincerely respectful and admiring friends at a distance, while allowing, and apparently enjoying, the ponderous and inane attentions of a long-legged dragoon from Lynchester barracks. Claud, not being in love, could not, of course, feel jealous; but he was puzzled and piqued; he did not see what he had done to merit such treatment; and he would have requested an explanation of it, if the perpetual presence of the aforesaid long-legged dragoon had not defeated all his attempts to obtain a private audience. A fragment of a dialogue, overheard in the tent, through the buzz of voices and the popping of champagne-corks—ill-natured, like the generality of dialogues wherein women's names are brought forward between men—had not served to dissipate his growing bad humor.

"Oh, Flemyng, eh? Daughter of the man with the long white hair, who makes such a preposterous fool of himself on the bench sometimes?"

"Yes. Pretty girl; uncommonly pretty; but a deuce of a flirt—yes. Quiet here—devilish quiet and demure, and all that—has her reasons, you know, her reasons—what? Old lady wanted to marry her to Croft last year; took a deal of trouble about it—yes. No money, you know; but looks and manners. Might do worse. Ballet girl, or something of that kind, you know—what? Always in a funk of some catastrophe happening, poor old thing!—yes. Nothing came of it, however."

"Croft wouldn't come up to the scratch, eh?"

"Well, some people said she wouldn't have him—thought he was a little too fond of ladies in general, or something. But between ourselves, it isn't often the girl who throws the man over in these cases—ha, ha, ha!—what? She hasn't broken her heart. Pick up somebody else, I dare say. Sharp girl, though—keeps in with the Crofts. Useful people, you know—take you up to London for the season, and buy you a new frock every now and then—yes. Have another glass of that champagne. It's all right; looked at the corks before I committed myself. Old soldier, you know—what?

Careless shafts of calumny, shot at random, do not, fortunately, always hit the traduced person; but on the other hand, it is to be regretted that they should so often wound or graze others in the course of their flight. Nina continued to smile upon her dragoon in blissful unconsciousness of the shocking

things that were being said about her, and it was Claud who retired to a bench at the extreme end of the tent, and there sat him down alone in profound disgust with the human race at large. I don't know whether King David was the first person to exclaim that all men are liars; but he is the only one that ever I heard of who qualified his ejaculation as a hasty one. Who expects to hear—alas! who can flatter himself that he always tells—the truth about his neighbors? We are all of us in the hands of our friends, and, Heaven be praised! we seldom know what they say of us. And in nine cases out of ten it does not in the least signify. But Claud, who was young, and as yet only partially resigned to the ways of the best of possible worlds, was foolish enough to think that it signified a good deal; and what with indignation against poor Colonel Finch, fear lest the old fellow's words might be true, and annoyance that he should feel such fear, he was worrying himself absurdly over matters with which he had no concern when Freddy's well-timed proposition came to release him from these unprofitable musings.

Next to hard work, hard play is the best of antidotes for mental anxiety; and before Claud had been a quarter of an hour in the field, he had forgotten all about Miss Flemyng. His extreme eagerness to prove to his neighbors that he was not, as most of them seemed to imagine, three parts a foreigner, but as good an Englishman as any of them, kept his whole attention concentrated upon the game, and he was so far successful as to be rewarded with several cries of "Well fielded!" And then, towards the close of the day, he had the great good fortune to make a sensational catch—one of those catches which, for being wholly unexpected and unpremeditated, do not the less cover a man with glory. He himself said afterwards that he had made a wild leap into the air, stretching out his left hand with a sort of forlorn hope of stopping the ball, which had somehow stuck in his fingers; and this was probably a sufficiently accurate statement of the facts; but at the moment he would hardly have given so modest an account of himself; and indeed the prolonged applause which greeted him from all sides of the field was enough to justify him in feeling that he had accomplished a great and wonderful feat. This was very delightful; but Fortune had yet other favors in store for him.

The Croft Manor eleven began their second innings with an hour of play before them; and when the stumps were drawn, Claud, who had been sent in third, carried out his bat triumphantly, having managed to put together a score of no less than fourteen, comprising two threes and a four. Perhaps

these hits ware rather the result of audacity than of skill; but that did not prevent the gallery from good-naturedly according a warm reception to the stranger, as he walked in; and when Claud saw Nina Flemyng clapping enthusiastically, to the imminent peril of a pair of eight-buttoned gloves, while the dragoon, who was not a cricketer, stood pulling his mustache in the background, he began to think that he had been a little too hard upon poor humanity earlier in the day.

Geneviève was not present to assist at her brother's triumph. Shortly after luncheon, Lady Croft, who knew nothing, and cared less about cricket, and in her heart cordially detested these yearly gatherings, with their accompanying noise and racket, had made her way timorously into the tent, as into a den of thieves, and had begged Miss Gervis to come out for a drive with her.

"I want you to do us all a great kindness," she explained, as soon as she was safely away from the dangerous neighborhood of the cricket-ball, and could breathe more freely. "My son tells me you are a wonderful violinist—*so* charming! I never heard of a lady playing a violin before, except Madame What's-her-name; and she of course is a professional—and *will* you drive over to Southlands with me, and fetch your instrument? It seems a great shame to take you away from all the other young people; but your papa said you were not very devoted to cricket; and if it is not asking *too* much of you—"

Geneviève could only say that she would be very happy to oblige her hostess.

"Oh, *thank* you." Lady Croft always spoke in italics, and with a certain plaintive intonation which seemed to imply that she was quite unable to cope with the troubles of this life, but was really doing the best she could. "There was another thing," she continued hesitatingly. "My son was very anxious that I should ask your—your friend, Miss Peters—Potter—"

"Potts," said Geneviève.

"Potts—*thank* you—that I should ask her to spend a few days with us; and I did speak to Mr. Gervis about it; but he said he thought it would be better not."

"Oh, yes; I knew he would object," observed Geneviève quietly. "I am very sorry anything was said about it."

Lady Croft made a little deprecating gesture. "But, my dear, I *think*, you know, your papa was right. Of course I should have been only too glad, I'm sure; but you see one does no' *generally* invite that sort of— That is, you understand—

"I quite understand," Geneviève said.

And so she and Lady Croft drove off to Southlands; and on their return the violin had the back-seat of the carriage to itself.

I have never performed upon any musical instrument myself—except, during a brief period of my youth, upon the cornopean, which I was getting on with quite nicely, and used to practice every day in the retirement of my bedroom, until a deputation of my nearest relatives waited upon me, with tears in their eyes, to implore me to desist—with this exception, I say, I have no personal experience of the joy of producing divine sounds; but I think I can in some degree realize the ecstasy of a finished musician in his art. I can fancy that to look down from a platform upon an audience made up of all sorts of human specimens, clever and dull, refined and vulgar, happy and unhappy—and to possess the conscious power of not only pleasing the ears of every one of them, but of touching the higher part of their nature, and lifting them for the time being to its level—I can fancy that this might be a position which one would not change for any that the world can offer. Or do you think the consummate masters of a most difficult art are too much absorbed by technicalities, too keenly alive to the necessity of correctness of execution, to share in their hearers' delight, and that what seems as easy and spontaneous as the song of a bird is really the result of an unremitting attention to prosaic details? I remember once hearing Mr. Flemyng put the latter query to a circle of patient listeners. "This train of thought," says he, with that air of a benevolent and patronizing lecturer which becomes him so well, "leads us back to the old question, what is genius?—which we have all heard defined, over and over again, as a capacity for taking infinite pains. Now genius is obviously of two kinds, the creative and the executive; and these two are not necessarily allied to the separate branches of art to which they should seem of nature to belong; so that you will find painters and sculptors, for instance, whose conceptions are less lofty than their carrying out of them; and musicians, again, who confer a meaning entirely their own upon the work of other men. The genius—I say advisedly genius—of our young friend Miss Gervis" (here Miss Gervis receives a flattering bow) "is distinctly of the creative order; and she will perhaps pardon me if I remind her that the bestowal upon it of infinite pains is essential to bring it to its highest development."

The truth is that Geneviève's were anything but painstaking performances. They were striking, impassioned, full of significance; but no doubt, often incorrect, and influenced, I should imagine, by no set of rules whatsoever. Her violin

was her tongue. Through its medium she poured forth the secrets of a reserved nature—the delight, the sadness, the wide sympathies which with her could never have found expression in speech; and whatever may be the experience of more skillful artists, it was evident that in her case execution was an unmixed happiness. This was doubtless the reason why she invariably carried her audience away with her. The guests at Croft Manor were assuredly as unimpressionable a set of commonplace folks as you would be likely to find in any English country-house during the cricketing season; moreover, at the time when Miss Gervis, at Lady Croft's request, took her violin out of its case, the majority of them were longing to exchange their dress-coats for a less formal garb, and to get away down-stairs to billiards and smoke; yet she held them entranced for the best part of half an hour, and might have done so much longer had she yielded to entreaties as sincere as they were unanimous.

Often, in after times, the memory of that evening revisited Freddy—the spacious room and the groups dispersed in different parts of it; the soft light of the shaded lamps falling upon many faces, some sunburnt, some wrinkled, some painted, but all after a fashion made beautiful by temporary self-forgetfulness; the tall, thin figure in its white draperies, standing with one leg slightly advanced and the right foot resting on a footstool, the small head a little thrown back, the long slender fingers moving deftly over the strings, the rushing bow so delicately poised, while all the air vibrated with the chords of those wild scherzos and thrilling adagios. The young fellow's heart thumped with a mixture of triumph and discouragement. How could he have had the presumption to think of that exquisite, unearthly being as his wife? How could he hope that she would ever take more than a friendly and condescending interest in one so far beneath her as he now felt himself to be? He was overwhelmed with shame at the thought that only a few weeks ago he had been smitten with the charms of Miss Lambert, and that *she* was aware of the disgraceful circumstance. He felt an almost irresistible inclination to throw himself at her feet there and then, and tell her everything—that she was his first love, as she would be his last (past little affairs being mere flashes in the pan, as it were, not worthy of mention or remembrance); that henceforth his life belonged to her alone; that if she would but hold him out the faintest encouragement, he would wait, and strive to earn her love, without murmuring at any delay; but that if she turned away from him, despair, dissipation and death must inevitably ensue. It is, however, hardly necessary to say that

he did not yield to this rash impulse, but only sighed, and murmured "Thank you," like everybody else.

Geneviève had become the center of a respectfully admiring throng, and was still standing by the piano, where she had taken up her station from mere force of habit—for she had been playing by heart and without accompaniment—when a gentleman from whom she had certainly not expected either praise or notice advanced and joined the group. Oddly enough, this was the first time that Mr. Gervis had listened to his daughter's violin. He had seen it, indeed, from time to time, in Varinka's drawing-room in Paris, but, being afflicted with a sensitive ear, had been careful to make no remark whatever upon what might so easily prove to be an instrument of torture; and now he had heard, had been surprised and enchanted, and was coming up to pay his compliments to the lady, as he would have done to any stranger.

"I congratulate you," said he, with a little bow. "You have talent and originality, and I think you may be a great violinist, one of these days. But—you are too advanced an artist to care only for politeness—may I permit myself a criticism or two?"

"Please do," said Geneviève, almost forgetting, in the pleasure of being praised by one whom she knew to be a true connoisseur, who her interlocutor was.

"Then let me advise you to cultivate repose. Repose, in the first place, of attitude and demeanor. That inspired air, that appearance of ecstasy, are charming; but it needs only the slightest thing in the world to make them ridiculous. An artist should avoid all such risks."

Geneviève frowned; this was not the sort of criticism she had expected. "I am sorry if I looked ridiculous," said she dryly; "but I have never given the subject a thought."

Gervis went on, quite unmoved by the interruption: "And as with attitude, so with execution. You have a tendency towards exaggeration. You accentuate certain passages overmuch, and you hurry the time so in others that no accompanyist would be able to keep up with you. But these are faults which are easily curable. You have had lessons of course: may I ask who your masters have been?"

Geneviève mentioned a few names, more or less known, "But I have practiced very little," she said. "All that I really know was taught me long ago, when I was quite a child, by Herr von Elbitz, an Austrian. He was very kind to me. He came often to the house, and took great pains, and it was he who gave me my first violin. But he went away suddenly, and I have never heard of him since," she concluded rather sadly.

A peculiar smile showed itself about the corners of Mr. Gervis's thin lips. "Ah," remarked he, "I think I recollect your instructor. A particularly good-looking young gentleman who was among the Princess's intimates at a certain time. And so he was very kind and took great pains? What are those lines I have read somewhere?—

> "While miss delights in her spinnet, the fiddler may a fortune get,
> And oft the dancing-master's art, leaps from the toes to touch the heart.

"And so he went away suddenly, did he? The Princess's friends not unfrequently do, I have observed."

Geneviève understood the innuendo. Alas! in such a home as hers had been, it would have been scarcely possible to conceal from her the interpretation placed by the world upon her step-mother's numberless platonic friendships; nor in truth had that maligned lady been chary of her confidences upon this point. The girl raised her eyes to Gervis's face, for one second, with a look of bitter anger and contempt, and then, silently turning her back upon him, walked away to the sofa where Freddy Croft was still sitting and chewing the cud of his reflections. Fortunately the bystanders, who had listened in no little astonishment to the opening of this odd colloquy between the father and daughter, had now dispersed, and its termination was not overheard.

Mr. Gervis looked after her, without ceasing to smile, and then slowly returned to his place beside Lady Croft, whose maternal eyes had found out Freddy's secret by this time, and whose heart was in such a flutter of agitation and hope that reticence was no longer in her power.

"I am so *delighted* with your daughter," she began. "*Such* a dear girl!—so quiet and natural and distinguished-looking. And her playing, of course, is simply superb! I am devoted to music; so is my son. Oh, Mr. Gervis, I can't tell you how I long to see him settled down, with a wife whom one knew to be really *nice* to look after him. If *only* the two young people would take a fancy to one another, how gladly I would make room for them, and look out for a new home!"

"You do us too much honor, Lady Croft," answered Mr. Gervis imperturbably; "but do not pack up your things yet. What with my invincible horror of marriage in the abstract, and what with your son's rather volatile disposition, your plan seems to me to have more than one very good chance of coming to nothing. As for my daughter, I am not very well acquainted with her; but it seems to me possible that she might disappoint you. Ladies who play the violin as she does, do

not generally belong to the model wife and mother class; and I have just discovered that she has a temper."

Here was a pretty reception to accord to the best *parti* in Lynshire! Lady Croft was more than half-inclined to administer the dignified snub which such language merited; but she refrained—partly because she was afraid of the man, and partly because, as she said to herself, he was evidently mad.

CHAPTER X.

A CORRESPONDENCE.

ONE of Princess Varinka's most frequent and bitter complaints against her absent husband was that he kept certain paid spies to dog her footsteps, to watch all her movements and actions, and duly to report upon the same to their employer. In a general way, she bore this alleged persecution lightly enough, declaring that she had nothing to conceal, and that those who wished to know how her life was spent were perfectly welcome to inform themselves upon the subject in any way that might seem good to them; but sometimes a fit of panic and suspicion would seize upon her, during which every member of her household was regarded, and told that he was regarded, with distrust. It was no uncommon thing for her, while in one of these moods, to dismiss her entire staff of servants at an hour's notice; nor did even Miss Potts's unquestionable honor and integrity always avail to protect her from insinuations of the most cruel and unworthy description. Poor Miss Potts, smarting under her wrongs, but withheld by her sworn allegiance to Geneviève from the dignified course of resigning the somewhat ill-defined position which she occupied, would go about her avocations, day after day, with red eyes and a broken-hearted aspect, until such time as Varinka with soft purrings and feline caresses lavished upon "her dear Potts, her good faithful Potts," saw fit to re-establish friendly relations. As a proof of restored confidence, the Princess would go so far as to borrow a ten-pound note from her good faithful old Potts upon occasion; for in that luxurious establishment there was often a temporary lack of hard cash.

Now it had happened that one of these recurrent outbreaks had taken place a few days previously to the Princess's departure from Southlands, to be followed by the customary reconciliation; and one result of the latter appears to have been a rather voluminous correspondence between the two ladies. A part of this correspondence has now—no matter by what means—

come into the possession of the painstaking compiler of this narrative, and may very well be made use of here, as a means of helping the history of the Gervis family on its way. Here is No. 1.

Southlands, August, 18—.

"MY DEAR MADAM,

"I hasten to acknowledge the receipt of your most kind and friendly letter, which reached me by this morning's post, and I can assure you that the flattering language in which you are so good as to speak of me was *not needed* to convince me that your doubt of my fidelity was no more than a passing misapprehension, arising out of circumstances with which I can *well* sympathize, and (as you are pleased to phrase it) make allowances for.

"It is indeed most natural that you should wish for the fullest information as to how our dear Geneviève's time is passed, now that she is deprived of your ever watchful care, and I gladly place my poor pen at your service, regretting only that I have not the power of chronicling events in that lively and graphic style which you, dear madam, possess in so eminent a degree.

"Geneviève tells me that she has herself written to you a long account of her visit to Croft Manor, where she seems to have enjoyed herself greatly, but where, judging by what I have heard from her and Mr. Claud, the behavior of the inmates is *most extraordinary*, and, *I* should say, scarcely becoming gentlemen and gentlewomen. But during my long absence from England manners have undergone so complete a change that I feel I am no longer able to speak with authority upon this subject; and in justice to Sir Frederick Croft (who, to my great surprise, remembered me, and sent me the kindest of messages through dear Geneviève), I must add that, notwithstanding the questionable taste of some of his proceedings, I am convinced that his *heart* is in the right place. He is an amiable and generous-minded young man, though mercurial, I fear.

"Since the return home of our little party, no incident of any importance has occurred to break the daily round of our occupations and amusements; but the fine weather which we continue to enjoy, together with the various pleasures of English country life, such as driving, lawn-tennis, and riding on horseback—the latter a most beneficial exercise for those whose nerves are strong enough to permit them to indulge in it—have prevented Geneviève from feeling dull; and I am thankful to say that I never saw our dear girl in better health and spirits.

"We have seen a good deal of company in a quiet way, and we are favored by having a few exceptionally agreeable neighbors, or perhaps I ought rather to say friends; for as such they are, I think, now regarded by the family. Mrs. Knowles, whom doubtless you know by repute, has quite won the affections of our young people, who frequently visit her at her house in Beachborough, and bring back droll accounts of her eccentric habits and startling speeches. I have myself only once had occasion to exchange words with this singular lady; namely, about a week ago, when she drove up in her old-fashioned dark green chariot to pay a formal afternoon call. It seems that she had not been to Southlands for many years past, and she was greatly interested in the various changes brought about by time in the place, and insisted upon being conducted all over the gardens, though she is infirm, and can only walk with the aid of a stick. She was just about to re-enter her carriage when she caught sight of me, and advancing towards me immediately, accosted me in an abrupt, but not unfriendly tone, with—'Oh, you are Miss Potts, eh? How do you do, Miss Potts?'

"Without any further preface, she proceeded to put to me a series of short, sharp questions relating to Geneviève's education and tastes, and to the manner in which she had been accustomed to spend her leisure time, when abroad. This species of cross-examination did not much please me; but I responded unreservedly, for I was a little thrown off my balance by the suddenness of the attack, and confused by the consciousness that Mrs. Knowles's eyes, which are singularly bright and piercing, were fixed upon me while I was speaking. When, however, she went on to deliver judgment—if I may so express myself—upon certain family matters, and to speak of you, dear madam, in far from respectful terms, I felt it my duty to say that I was bound by ties of gratitude and affection to the Gervis family, and that I must beg to be excused from listening to observations reflecting upon *any* member of it. Thereupon Mrs. Knowles laughed, saying that I was 'a sensible woman not to chatter,' and, after a few more remarks, which I prefer not to repeat, got into her carriage, and was driven away. She is, I believe, a good and benevolent lady; but it is easy to see that she prides herself upon being what is called a woman of the world, and that her favor would be readily accorded to any one who took pleasure in listening to her *sarcasms*, and replied to them in a *similar vein*.

"A more frequent guest in this house, and one whose society is, I confess, much more agreeable to me, is Mr. Flemyng, a man of high scholarly attainments, from whose conversation profit, as well as pleasure, may be always derived, al-

though the subjects of which he treats are often too deep for the comprehension of ordinary people, like myself, and although, when discussing religious topics, he displays that tendency towards latitudinarianism—not to say *free thought*—which, I fear, is almost universal among the distinguished thinkers of the present day. This is, no doubt, a subject for sincere regret; but Mr. Flemyng's great natural gifts, his clear intellect, and the lofty standpoint from which he regards those problems of life which most of us are too apt to ignore, or carelessly set on one side, make him a truly valuable addition to our small circle, and I rejoice that he should come so often among us.

"Of course such a man as I have attempted to describe is a tempting object for the covert ridicule of *cynical* persons; and it has vexed me to observe the ill-concealed laughter with which certain stratagems (doubtless carefully prepared beforehand) to lead him into self-contradiction have been rewarded. I am convinced, nevertheless, that his society and example cannot but be beneficial to our dear young people, who, as is only natural at their age, are a little inclined towards frivolity.

"I wish I could speak and think as favorably of his daughter, Miss Nina Flemyng; but I cannot conscientiously do so. Her self-possession and *aplomb* may be found fascinating by gentlemen, and her capricious change of moods, varying from extreme taciturnity to the most unreserved communicativeness, may impose upon some people, and lead them to set her down as a *creature of impulse;* but *me* she has never deceived for one moment; and were I to tell all—" (Here the manuscript is disfigured by two lines carefully erased.) "The truth is that she is a *sly girl*, whose designs are only too evident to me. This is strictly between ourselves, dear madam, and I am sure you will not allow it to go any further; but I fear that she has made up her mind to captivate Mr. Claud, and, what is worse, that she has succeeded. He is with her morning, noon, and night. Now it is one pretext, now another; but whether she makes up a party to spend the afternoon in sailing in the yacht, or whether he goes over to the Moated House to play lawn-tennis; whether they wade together into deep pools among the rocks to catch prawns—a pretty pursuit for a young lady!—or whether they explore the lanes in search of ferns—and I will answer for it that she does not know a hart's tongue from a polypody—some excuse for their spending the greater part of their time in one another's company is always ready. Ah, if men could only see girls as we see them! If they knew what that affectation of coldness one day and ex-

aggerated friendliness the next really meant, and what old, threadbare stratagems are thought good enough to delude such simpletons as the wisest of them become the moment a pretty woman thinks fit to devote herself to them—if, in a word, they had any common sense *at all*, young persons like Miss Flemyng would never get husbands. I lose all patience, and I feel myself growing quite hot and angry, as I write about it. To think that Mr. Claud, so clever and clear-sighted in cases where the prospects of others seem in danger of being compromised, should be so blind to his own peril! I am only a poor old governess, and perhaps I ought to mind my own business and hold my tongue; but I have known Mr. Claud since he was a tiny curly-headed boy in a blouse and short socks—always tumbling down he was, and cutting his poor bare knees, and well I remember how he used to come running to me for some of my *pommade divine*—and now it breaks my heart to think of his throwing himself away upon a fortune-hunting flirt. Only yesterday afternoon I was walking on the cliffs, and what did I see on the sands below me! Mr. Claud standing on a rock, with his prawning-net in his hand, and that odious girl a few yards off, vowing—for I understood her gesticulations well enough—that she was afraid to cross the space of shallow water that separated them from one another. Of course he came splashing back to her; of course there were entreaties and protestations; and then—I hardly like to write it—he actually took that shameless creature up in his arms, and *carried her across!*

"Dear madam, I feel that I have been a little indiscreet in mentioning this incident, of which I have spoken to *no one* but yourself; but it will serve to show you that I have *real* grounds for my alarm. Although nothing has passed between us upon the subject, I know that dear Geneviève shares my anxiety, and that it is making her unhappy. How much of all this may be suspected, and how much approved, by *other persons*, I have no idea; but I can scarcely suppose that Mr. Claud's marriage at so early an age and to so undesirable a lady could be viewed with satisfaction by *any one* who felt an interest in his welfare.

"But it is time for me to conclude this letter which I should not have ventured to make so long, had you not requested me to send you a detailed account of the manner in which our days are spent and an accurate description of all our intimates. Trusting that I may have acquitted myself of this task to your satisfaction,

"I remain, dear madam,
"Yours most truly,
"MATILDA POTTS."

II.

"Villa Beausite, Trouville,—August, 187—.

"Allons, voyons, ma très-chère Potts, qu'est-ce que vous me chantez ta? Have I asked you for a description of that insupportable old Flemyng? Do you think by any chance that I am interested in the gossip of Mrs. Knowles, or the amours of Claud? Let him carry about all the young girls of the vicinity in his arms, if he pleases. C'est shocking, si vous voulez, mais enfin c'est son affaire. Parlez-moi plutôt de notre jeune baronet. What does he do? Does he come often to see you? Is he well received? And Geneviève—does she appear to regard him with favorable eyes? There, my good Potts, is what I should have wished to hear: the rest is all one to me. When you have any news of some importance to give, you will write to me, will you not? But for the love of God, do not afflict me with your provincials! They bore me to death, and I have not the smallest curiosity to learn their sentiments with regard to me. But, after all, it will perhaps be easier to you to tell me the whole of your history than to suppress a part of it. Continue then, dear and respectable Potts, continue always; and believe in the gratitude of your devoted

"V."

III.

"Southlands,—August, 187—.

"DEAR MADAM,

"Pray pardon me if my last letter was too discursive, and if I allowed myself to treat in it of matters in which, and persons with whom, you could feel no sympathy. My excuse must be that I should always be deeply interested in Mr. Claud, as the brother of my dear Geneviève, even if his uniform kindness had not long ago won my gratitude; and excuse my adding that I believe that you, dear madam, are less indifferent to his happiness than you would have me suppose. I will not, however, take up your time by saying anything more about him to-day than that he continues to devote himself as assiduously as ever to Miss Flemyng, and that we see little of him here, except at the breakfast and dinner hours.

"Of Sir Frederick Croft I should doubtless have spoken at greater length in my last letter, had he been in this neighborhood at the time when I wrote; but he was away just then—I think at the Goodwood races—and it is only within the last few days that he has returned. Now, however, he is in this house

constantly; and I may add that he has made himself liked by all who dwell here.

"Dear madam, I feel some delicacy and hesitation in entering upon a subject which, near and dear though it may be to both our hearts, is yet one upon which you have never, *in plain words*, addressed me. Nevertheless, I am convinced that you would not keep your wishes with regard to Geneviève a secret from me, whose sole object in life is to forward her happiness; and upon my *discretion* I need not say that you can rely. Your letter, which, as it happened, arrived on the evening of Sir Frederick's return, and was read by me while he was actually in the room, was like a sudden revelation to me. How I could have been so dull as not to have guessed, long ago, what your hopes were, I cannot imagine; but I suppose the truth is that my wits are not quite as bright as they once were; and besides, I have always fancied—I am thankful to find *erroneously*—that you had other views for my dear girl, and that you did not look forward to seeing her established in an *English home*.

"Well, my dear madam, I can report to you that, so far as *he* is concerned, your mind may be at rest. I have, of course, watched him narrowly ever since my eyes became opened by the hint conveyed in your note, and I cannot doubt that he is —if I may allow myself the expression—over head and ears in love. Everything proves it. It is not only that he rides over here every morning, staying usually to luncheon, and sometimes allowing himself to be persuaded to remain to dinner also; it is not only that he has presented her with a bull-terrier puppy—a troublesome little creature, I must confess, which is always running behind me and biting my heels, and has already destroyed two of the drawing-room cushions—it is not that he follows her about like her shadow, and listens to her violin as though it were the music of the angels in Heaven that he heard. All this might only show that his *fancy* was engaged; and, from what I have been told and have seen, Sir Frederick is *impressionable*, not to say fickle. But there is more than this. A palpable, an *unmistakable* change has come over the young man. His spirits are by no means what they were a few weeks ago; his manner is often absent and slightly melancholy; he has certainly grown thinner; and what strikes me most of all is the respectfulness of his demeanor towards Geneviève, whose every wish appears to be a law to him. May it be so always, until the end of their lives!

"And now as to *her*. Here I cannot speak so positively. If any one could interpret her thoughts, surely I should be able to do so; but I am not yet *sure* whether she has realized the

extent of Sir Frederick's devotion; still less whether she has discovered any echo to it in her own heart. You know how reserved she is, and that all her feelings lie *deep*, and do not readily rise to the surface. This morning, however, while I was arranging the flowers in the morning-room, and she and Sir Frederick were seated by the window, some words passed between them which gave me matter for subsequent reflection. She was urging him—*most* properly, I am sure—to seek for some definite object to which to devote his energies and his abundance of leisure; and he, while admitting that his life was a purposeless one, complaining that there was no way open to him of making it less so. For parliamentary duties, he said, he felt himself unfit, and he added, in his jocular way, that street-preaching and taking the chair at temperance meetings were the only other safety-valves that he knew of for young men of property in search of a mission. 'But there is your property itself,' said she; 'surely there must be interests connected with that, if you would look for them.' And then, to my great surprise, she began quite coolly to state her views of what an ideal English landowner ought to be.

"Now, when I heard her talking as glibly as possible about rent-audits and high farming and the prospects of the agricultural laborer, I began to ask myself how and why she had learned all about these matters, of which I am sure that she was as ignorant a fortnight ago as I am at this hour; and I very much doubt whether it is interest in the Southlands estate that has caused her to take so much trouble. In short I have a suspicion—perhaps I ought to say a *hope*—that what you desire may come to pass. For indeed I do hope with all my heart that, when my dearest Geneviève's choice is made, it may fall upon one who loves her as Sir Frederick Croft evidently does, and who is as estimable and well meaning as I truly believe him to be. Only—" Here we come to more erasures and a large, watery-looking smudge.

"But I trust, dear madam," resumes the writer, beginning a fresh page, "that you will pardon a foolish old woman if she cannot all at once conquer certain misgivings. All this has come upon me with great suddenness; and although I have always known that sooner or later I must expect to part with my dearest child, and that it would be for her happiness that I should do so; I did not imagine that the hour of separation was so near at hand. If, therefore, some natural depression of spirits (for I cannot forget Sir Frederick's *very* recent entanglement with another lady, nor have I reached my time of life without some knowledge of what *all* men are) prevents me from expressing myself in an unreservedly joyful strain, and causes

me to cut my letter a little shorter than I had intended, you will not, I hope, dear madam, be displeased with

"Your sincere and obliged friend,

"MATILDA POTTS."

"P. S.—What the designs and wishes of *a certain person* are with regard to the possibility which we contemplate, I am wholly unable to surmise. He cannot be ignorant of what is going on; but he exhibits neither approval nor disapproval, only watching them sometimes with a kind of amused smile, and screwing up his eyes in the way that you know of, which *may* be only shortsightedness, but which, to *my* mind, always gives the countenance a sinister expression."

IV.

"*Trouville,—August, 187—.*

"You wretch, Potts! You heartless, hypocritical wretch! Where have you found the audacity to throw that horrible news in my face, and to pretend to think that you were giving me pleasure? That you should deceive me and plot against me in my absence, that does not surprise me; you are capable of it. That you should play the game of my enemies, while assuring me of your fidelity, that is nothing more than I have suspected you of for a long time past. But that you should have the effrontery to disclose your conduct, and to sustain to me that I—*I*—have desired to make a match between Geneviève and an Englishman whom I have never even seen—*mais ça n'a pas de nom!* You make me sick, Potts! You speak of it very much at your ease—of this marriage, this parting with your 'dearest child.' *Et moi donc?* Is she not my child as much as yours? Is it not under my roof that she has spent her life? And now, among you, you have agreed to rob me of her—to marry her in England, where you know that I cannot breathe, and where she would be as lost to me as if she were dead.

"*Mais il n'en sera rien! c'est moi qui vous en réponds!* By this post I write to Gervis—I remind him of his promises, his oaths—I demand that Geneviève be restored to me immediately, and I expose your perfidy, you infamous Potts! You will accompany her, I suppose. It is your duty, and your room will be ready for you. But I will not speak to you. And do not permit yourself to address another letter to me. You have planted a dagger in my heart, and I can never forgive you.

"VARINKA, PRINCESSE OURANOFF."

V.

"*Southlands,—August, 187—.*

"MADAME LA PRINCESSE,

"In spite of the prohibition you have laid upon me, I find myself compelled to reply to your letter received yesterday, which, I need hardly say, has caused me a great deal of pain. Perhaps I shall best consult my dignity by leaving unnoticed the injurious accusations and epithets with which you have seen fit to assail me, and by trusting to *your own conscience* to tell you whether they have been, or are, deserved. What I have to confess and to apologize for is, firstly, that I misinterpreted the meaning of your previous letter, and, secondly, that I imprudently committed to writing impressions which may prove to be wholly without foundation, and which I should in any case have done more wisely to keep to myself.

"I must now say that I have Mr. Gervis's commands to convey a message to you; but I feel that I cannot discharge this task without a brief explanation, and even at the risk of wearying or displeasing you, I must relate the circumstances under which it was imposed upon me.

"After breakfast, this morning, I was sitting alone in the rose-garden, whither I had repaired in search of the *solitude* which I felt to be necessary for me, when I perceived Mr. Gervis approaching me with an open letter in his hand. 'You heard from the Princess to-day,' he began. I signified assent. 'Do not distress yourself,' said he—for I was unable upon the spur of the moment to subdue the agitation in which he had surprised me—'Take example by me. I also have been favored with a shower of abuse quite as heavy as any that can have fallen upon you, and you see that it has left me perfectly calm.'

"He then went on to make some observations upon the danger and folly of letter-writing, remarking that he himself had for years abstained as much as possible from all correspondence, except such as related to matters of business. 'And for that reason,' he added, in conclusion, 'I will ask you to be so kind as to include my reply to the Princess in your own.'

"I ventured to submit that such a course would be eminently distasteful to me; but he rejoined that to write with his own hand would be equally distasteful to *him*, and that, all things considered, he preferred putting me to inconvenience to suffering it himself. He then proceeded to dictate to me the message which it was his desire that I should dispatch to you. 'Remind the Princess, in the first place,' he said, 'that I made her no distinct promise whatsoever. Remind her, in the sec-

ond place, that I committed myself to a strong expression of opinion; and tell her that that opinion remains unchanged. Inform her, in the third place, that it is not my intention to send Miss Gervis back to France at present; but that the allowance for her maintenance, which has hitherto been paid quarterly to the Princess's bankers, will continue to be so paid, whether my daughter's visit to me is or is not prolonged. That,' said he, 'will, I hope, be found reassuring.'

"With these words he turned, as if to leave me; but my anxiety and my apprehensions emboldened me to detain him for a few moments, during which I endeavored to explain what it was that I dreaded on my dear Geneviève's behalf, and pleaded that she should not be exposed to the risk of contracting a serious attachment, if nothing were intended to come of it. He listened to me with great patience, and spoke in terms which I could not but feel to be most gratifying, *if sincere*, of my attachment to my former pupil; but he gave no definite reply to my question, merely pointing out to me that the world is full of risks for us all, and that he could not shut his house to Sir Frederick Croft, or to other young men, because, in the event of their subsequently asking him for his daughter's hand, he might find it necessary to meet them with a refusal. I was forced to admit the justice of this observation; and with that our interview came to an end.

"I have now, Madame la Princesse, given you a full and true report of this conversation. I abstain from comments upon it, which, in your present unfortunate frame of mind towards me, might not be found acceptable by you. I think it, however, my duty to add—lest at some future time you should accuse me of want of candor, or of suppressing facts—that Sir Frederick Croft is at present staying in this house, where he has been invited to remain for three days, on the occasion of the Beachborough regatta, his own family being, as I understand, away from home.

"I am alone in the house while I write, the entire party having driven down to the town early in the day to witness the aquatic sports. They were so kind as to press me urgently to accompany them; but I did not feel myself in sufficiently good spirits to yield to their friendly entreaties, and I was unwilling to damp the hilarity of the party by intruding upon it the presence of one who has never been able to assume a cheerful exterior while suffering inwardly from the *unmerited* displeasure of those to whom she is attached and whom she has ever striven to serve faithfully.

"I have the honor to be, Madame la Princesse,

"Your obedient servant,

"MATILDA POTTS."

CHAPTER XI.

BEACHBOROUGH REGATTA.

BEACHBOROUGH regatta-day is essentially a festival of the people. The upper stratum of local society only countenances the proceedings to the extent of forwarding its subscription to Mr. Mayor for prizes and fireworks, and for the most part shuts itself up indoors, grumbling and growling, and thanking Heaven that the 20th of August comes but once a year. Meanwhile the town throws off its customary air of sober gentility, gives itself up to mirth of a low order, and descends, for the time being, to the level of Margate on a bank holiday. After eleven o'clock in the morning, all the shops are closed; the young gentlemen and ladies from behind the counter emerge, and show themselves upon the Esplanade in gay apparel; excursion trains from Lynchester, and other more distant places, bring hundreds of over-heated strangers to swell the throng; brass bands, itinerant photographers and nigger minstrels take possession of the beach; and it must be confessed that expressions may occasionally be heard flying about among the ranks of this assemblage which are not of a strictly parliamentary kind.

Now if there is one thing that we abhor more than another in Beachborough it is vulgarity. It grieves us to see these dreadful people making themselves at home upon our shingle, scattering orange-peel and cherry-stones upon our asphalte, and lolling upon the benches which are wont to afford rest to our own noble persons. The whole spectacle is revolting to us; and it is as much as we can do to cast a disdainful glance, every now and then, from behind our closed windows, at the boat races, the duck hunts and the greasy poles which give so much unbounded delight to our humbler fellow-townsmen outside.

"When this infernal regatta-day comes round, sir," says Admiral Bagshawe, "I shut my daughters up in the back rooms of the house. You may talk to me till you're black in the face about the amusements of the people; but if the people can't amuse themselves without getting beastly drunk in broad daylight and using words, sir, which make me shudder—positively shudder" (and he an old sailor too! What license of language *can* these miscreants have permitted themselves?) "all I can say is, the less the people amuse themselves the better—the less the better, by gad!"

From all this it will be perceived that it was really very wrong of Freddy Croft to represent to his friends at Southlands that they ought to show themselves in Beachborough on the regatta-day. As, however, they were able to view the saturnalia from the deck of their yacht, and never approached nearer than within a mile and a half of the shore, they scarcely ran more risk of contamination than Admiral Bagshawe's daughters; and, taking into consideration the fact that they were virtually foreigners, one ought not perhaps to be too hard upon them for having found the scene both picturesque and diverting. With the reader's permission, we will once more pay a flying visit to the *Siren*, and station ourselves for a time as invisible spectators in the after part of that roomy vessel.

The sun has run his daily journey across a cloudless sky, and is dropping down towards his rest behind the western hills; the yacht lies motionless upon the glassy waters of the bay; the various events of the day's programme have passed off—to borrow the expression of Mr. Pottinger, the mayor, who has just been on board to pay his respects—"without an 'itch;" and only the last of these—"a sculling race, to be rowed (weather permitting) in outrigged skiffs for a prize of twenty-five sovereigns, presented by Sir Frederick Croft, Bart."—remains for decision. Freddy, the originator and organizer of this rather hazardous competition, has gone off to take part in it; Geneviève, Claud and Nina Flemyng are leaning over the side, their field-glasses fixed upon the distant starting-point; Mr. Gervis is reclining in a wicker arm-chair, with eyes, as usual, half closed, while Mr. Flemyng, also as usual, is enjoying the monopoly of speech.

The heat of the weather has led Mr. Flemyng to supplement an ample luncheon by repeated draughts of champagne-cup; his countenance beams with benevolence and good-will; the ever-flowing stream of his words rolls on with a certain acquired richness of utterance.

"Yes, Mr. Gervis, I believe that the benefits conferred upon England, in an unobtrusive way, by the system of an unpaid magistracy are beyond calculation. It is a peculiarly English institution. My impression is—and if I am not mistaken, your experience of foreign life will, no doubt, enable you to set me right—that there is nothing corresponding to it in other countries. In fact, I doubt whether you would find in any other country a class of men resembling that from which our county magistrates are chosen."

Mr. Gervis is understood to say that he is convinced that the class in question is unique.

"Well, we don't lay claim to much knowledge of law; that is not necessary; nor are we men of any great intellectual power—at least, the generality of us are not," says Mr. Flemyng, remembering one conspicuous exception to this rule; "but we have common sense and tact—yes, I think I may say that we have tact—and we understand the people with whom we have to deal. Which, you know, is half the battle. I was sorrow you could not remain longer at our meeting the other day; still I dare say you heard enough to gain some rough idea of the working of the system,"

"I think so," answered Mr. Gervis modestly. "And I assure you I was immensely diverted."

"Eh?"

"I say I was greatly edified. Some of the decisions struck me as most—remarkable."

"Ah, I am glad you were pleased. Cases often come before us which demand something more than a mere competency to adjudicate upon the bare facts, if you understand what I mean. For instance, there was that charge of assault which you heard, and which very likely you thought that we dismissed rather cavalierly. The fact is, we knew perfectly well that severity would be misplaced there. The one man was really as much to blame as the other, and it was for the benefit of the whole parish, as well as for their own, that they should shake hands over it, and put an end to a long-standing quarrel. Then, again, there was another case which we dealt with in a different spirit; that of the man who was charged with shooting a partridge, as you may remember."

"Perfectly. It seems to have been an instance of singular depravity. One of your brother magistrates—the old clergyman with the very brilliant complexion—whispered to me that a man who would shoot a partridge in August would do anything."

"Ah, poor Turner, yes. One of the old school. A well-meaning man, but a little hasty and injudicious in his remarks sometimes. I need not point out to you that the offense *per se* was not a very grave one; and in fact Turner himself was for letting the prisoner off with a severe reprimand and the smallest fine we could inflict; but I was firm with him. 'By no means,' I said. 'On the contrary, let it be the heaviest fine permissible and ten days' imprisonment in default. Burvill,' I said, addressing the prisoner, 'you are a notorious vagabond. This is not the first time that we have seen you here; and I suspect that you ought to have been brought up before us more often than you have been. Now—'"

"No relation to Tom Burvill, the fisherman, I hope," broke

in Claud. "Tom has shown us many a good day's sport, and I should be sorry to hear of any one belonging to him getting into trouble."

"The father, I believe, of your friend," answered Mr. Flemyng, looking as if he did not much relish the interruption, "and, as I was saying, a notorious rogue and vagabond. He has been insolent to me personally upon more than one occasion; though of course I did not allow that circumstance to weigh with me. Well, I gave him to understand that, now that he was in our power, we intended to make an example of him; and I think the fellow's assurance was rather shaken when he heard the amount he would have to pay."

"That, I suppose," remarked Mr. Gervis, blandly, "was one of the cases which demand something more than a mere competency to adjudicate upon bare facts."

"Exactly so; and—"

"And did he pay?" asked Claud, interrupting again.

"Well, yes," answered Mr. Flemyng, rubbing the back of his head, with a movement of vexation; "I am sorry to say that he did. The man was removed, and I thought of course that he would be locked up; but somehow or other—whether he has stolen more than I gave him credit for, or whether he got a loan from his friends, I can't say—the money was forth-coming, and so there was an end of it. I saw him loafing about on the beach this morning with a number of his lazy companions, and they made some coarse jest at my expense as I passed. These fishermen are an unruly and independent lot. They stand by one another, and manage to set authority at defiance in more ways than one; and as they all have a vote both for parliamentary and municipal elections, they are able, I regret to say, to bring a certain amount of pressure to bear upon the borough magistrates. It is a grievous scandal. Municipal reform, Mr. Gervis, is urgently needed both here and elsewhere. The rate-payers of this town require to be roused to a sense, not only of their interests, but of their duty."

But Mr. Flemyng found it advisable to put off further remarks upon this important subject to some more favorable opportunity, perceiving that no one—not even Mr. Gervis—was listening to him. For now the first sculling race ever rowed in Beachborough bay had begun; and it was not on board the *Siren* alone that this novel contest was watched with breathless interest.

Four competitors only—the fittest survivors of a numerous entry—had the courage to assemble at the mark-boat, and were now urging their frail craft over the calm water. Besides Freddy himself, there was young Plummer (junior partner in the

well-known firm of Plummer, Sandham & Sons, wholesale and retail grocers, High Street, Beachborough, established 1750); there was a certain solicitor's clerk, Thomson by name; and finally there was Maltby, the brewer, a muscular youth belonging to that luckless betwixt-and-between class of which most country towns furnish a few samples—unfortunates whom wealth has deprived of their old companions, but has not as yet floated into the society of those who fancy themselves their betters. Maltby, who rode straight to hounds, was a steady shot and a good bowler, had, by virtue of these excellences, earned a friend in Freddy Croft, for whose various small marks of attention he was so inordinately grateful that it was quite an open question whether he would be able to bring himself to win a race from his beloved patron.

As far as could be seen, however, he was not likely to have much choice in the matter. Freddy took the lead from the first, and drew away with long, easy strokes, leaving Plummer and Thomson more and more hopelessly in the rear every moment. The brewer, a more powerful man, but heavier and in less good condition, stuck to him pluckily; so that, to unpracticed eyes, there was some semblance of a struggle; but Claud, who had been a wet-bob at Eton, knew that his friend could win as he liked.

"It is no race at all," said he, dropping his glasses, with a slight gesture of disappointment, at the end of the first round. "It's Croft first, and the rest nowhere."

"Oh, I hope he will win!" exclaimed Geneviève.

"I am not sure that I do. It is rather hard upon the others to ask them to start upon even terms with an Oxonian; and that big man really has some notion of what he is about, though he will persist in feathering so near the water. Besides, doesn't it seem rather absurd to give a prize, and carry it off yourself?"

"Oh, but he does not mean to accept the prize," replied Geneviève promptly; "he is going to make the one who comes in second take it. And he would not have raced at all, if they had not begged him so hard, and declared that none of them would start unless he did."

"It seems that you know all about it, Gen," remarked Claud. "Perhaps you can tell us who *is* to come in second."

Whereat Miss Flemyng laughs in that low, musical way that she has, which sounds enchanting to certain prejudiced ears, and ill-natured to others, no doubt equally prejudiced.

Meanwhile the scullers have rounded the east mark-boat for the second time; and what is the meaning of that murmur which arises, all of a sudden, from the beach, and swells into a general roar, amidst which certain articulate shouts, such as

"Hooray, Maltby! Well rowed, Maltby!"—"Now, Sir Frederick, wake up, sir!" can be distinguished? Can it be a race after all? Sure enough, the brewer has made a magnificent spurt. He is overtaking his leader—he has caught him—he is level with him. On board the *Siren* the excitement becomes intense, and everybody begins to speak at once. "He has passed him, I do believe!" "Not a bit of it; it only looks as if he had from where you are standing." "Freddy leads!" "No, he doesn't, Maltby leads." What is certain is that both men are doing their best, and that if Freddy bears away the prize, it will not be without having had a fight for it. Mr. Gervis remarks casually that he will take odds about the brewer's chance even now; and Miss Flemyng with great presence of mind, immediately lays him thirteen pairs of gloves to a dozen on Freddy.

"Why, it's a thousand pounds to a penny on him!" cries Claud, forgetting his manners a little in the heat of the moment.

Nina observes quietly that it is never a thousand pounds to a penny on any event; but she little imagines what a speedy confirmation her assertion is to receive.

Nobody will ever know how it was that Freddy managed to get swamped within fifty yards of the winning-point. An absurd rumor was set about in Beachborough to the effect that he had done it purposely, not wishing to win the race, and finding that he could not lose it; another theory laid the blame of the catastrophe upon one of those pestilent steam-launches, which came puffing up at that moment, to be in at the finish, raising the usual swell as it went; and there were even found some persons impertinent enough to allege that Sir Frederick lost his balance, and caught a crab. He himself avers that he has not the most distant idea of how it happened and that all he can say is that it does not take a very great deal to upset an outrigger.

Whatever the cause of the mishap may have been, the consternation of the spectators on board Mr. Gervis's yacht, when their friend suddenly disappeared from view, may be imagined. Geneviève did not at first understand what was the matter; but when she realized that a distant object upon the water, which flashed as it caught the sun's rays, was Freddy's boat, floating bottom upwards, she could not repress a cry of alarm. "Oh, Claud, tell them to lower a boat at once. He will be drowned. Why don't they do something?"

"He is all right," returned Claud, calmly. "Don't you see him swimming? Croft is amphibious. But he has lost his race, and Miss Flemyng has lost her gloves."

It was too true; and deep was Miss Flemyng's self-reproach on remembering that she had laid the odds on Sir Frederick instead of against the brewer. For, while Geneviève was watching the leisurely progress of a black head shorewards, and the sympathetic reception subsequently accorded to a dripping figure upon the shingle, the sculling championship and the purse of five-and-twenty sovereigns was being won after an unexpected fashion. Maltby, good man, was stronger in the arms than in the head, and the sight of his revered patron struggling in the water threw him into a panic as great as, and far more unreasonable than, Geneviève's. That he did not immediately cast himself in after the unfortunate competitor was only owing to a timely recollection that Freddy could swim like a fish; but he forgot all about the race, backed water, and remained motionless, gazing stupidly after the retreating swimmer, until something or somebody came splashing and snorting by him, and cheers, not unmingled with laughter, proclaimed the triumph of Plummer, Sandham & Sons. Well might Nina declare, with a stamp of her foot, that she would never touch another drop of that man's beer to the end of her life.

With this unsatisfactory victory the proceedings of the day ended; and half an hour later Geneviève was driving homewards behind a pair of cobs which had latterly been appropriated to her especial use. She was alone; for Freddy, who had occupied the place beside her in the morning, and who had not been able to change his boating flannels, would not consent to ruin her cushions by sitting upon them in his saturated condition, and had reluctantly ensconced himself in a corner of the break which had borne away the rest of the party. Geneviève let her horses walk up the long hill. The evening was sultry, and the road ankle-deep in dust, and rapid motion seemed likely to entail discomforts of various kinds. So the quiet, well-fed cobs took things easily, straggling from one side of the road to the other, and stopping, every now and then, to stamp when the flies became particularly troublesome, while their driver, allowing the reins to hang loosely in her hand, indulged in a prolonged reverie.

Of what was she thinking, as she leaned back in her low carriage, those melancholy eyes of hers fixed upon vacancy, and her whip absently flicking the overhanging growth of the hedges by the wayside? Perhaps of the future, that endless subject of speculation for those who are young enough to believe that the fulfillment of dreams lies hidden there; perhaps of the present, which for young and old alike is mostly full of perplexities; perhaps of nothing at all; for on hot summer

evenings, when little breezes just stir the leaves, and there is a sleepy hum of insects in the air, and all living things seem to cease from their daily toil, the mind will sometimes approach very nearly to that state of restful beatitude. Whatever may have been the subject of her musings, it could not have been altogether disagreeable; for though her eyes kept their sad, dreamy look, a faint smile dawned gradually upon her lips and remained there. Moreover, she had noticed the passage of time so little that she was much surprised to find herself opposite the Southlands lodge, after having taken the best part of an hour to accomplish a distance of barely three miles.

She had gathered up her reins, and was preparing to turn in at the gate, when there appeared suddenly, from somewhere out of the twilight, the tall, spare figure of a man, who, striding forward, and laying one hand upon the side of the pony-carriage, announced in a hollow theatrical voice, "C'est moi!" Immediately after which he fell back in evident discomfiture, murmuring, "Mille pardons, mademoiselle!" and bowing down to the ground.

Geneviève paused, uncertain whether to drive on, and leave this bewildered stranger to his fate, or ask him what he wanted. He was a narrow-shouldered man, in a tightly-buttoned, thread-bare coat and dusty boots, who might or might not be a gentleman in reduced circumstances. His face was thin, drawn, and scored with deep lines, his light-blue eyes had an anxious, deprecating look, and there was a shrinking submission about his whole attitude, as he stood bare-headed by the wayside, which moved Geneviève to pity. While she was looking at him he seemed to gather fresh courage, and advanced a step or two with another low bow.

"Have I not the honor to address Miss Gervis?" he asked, in English.

Geneviève bowed.

"I have been waiting a long time in the hope of seeing the Princess Ouranoff: in this uncertain light, I mistook you for her at first, mademoiselle—a stupid error. May I inquire whether the Princess is living here at present?"

"She is not," Geneviève answered; "she is abroad." And then, perceiving the half-suppressed gesture of dismay with which the stranger received this intelligence, she added hesitatingly, "Can I do anything for you?"

He shook his head, muttering something about a matter of business, and a communication he had wished to make to the Princess, but looked so broken-hearted over it, and so ill and exhausted withal, that Geneviève could not find it in her heart to leave him.

"Mr. Gervis is at home. Would you not like to see him?" she suggested.

"Mr. Gervis—ah! Mr. Gervis," he echoed, speaking hardly above a whisper, and keeping his eyes fixed upon the dusty road. "Yes; I could see him. Perhaps, after all, it would be the best way—since one is driven to it. Yes: perhaps it would be best that I should see Mr. Gervis."

"I am sure it would," said Geneviève, encouragingly.

The fact was that she had taken the new-comer's measure by this time. Persons resembling him were not unfrequent visitors in the Boulevard Malesherbes—distressed Russian noblemen, whom political or other misfortunes had reduced to want, and who relied upon a former acquaintanceship with the Princess Ouranoff, or simply upon the tie of a common nationality, to loosen her purse strings for their benefit. Varinka was always amiable with these unfortunates. If her husband was away, she relieved them out of her own pocket with so exquisite a grace that the smallness of the donation seemed a matter of secondary importance to its grateful recipients; but if, by any chance, Mr. Gervis happened at the time to be occupying his suite of rooms overhead, it was thither that they were requested to address themselves, and thence that they would shortly emerge, bearing with them a larger sum than they had counted upon, together with the memory of certain caustic speeches which freed them from any harassing sense of obligation. Geneviève knew that, whatever might be her father's faults, parsimony was not one of them, and had no fear that this poor wretch would be sent empty away from Southlands. Only, being still in some uncertainty as to his social standing, she debated within herself whether she ought to offer him the vacant seat in her pony-carriage or not. Another glance at his weary face turned the scale in his favor.

"If you will allow me, I will drive you up to the house," she said.

"Oh, mademoiselle, you are too good. I shall go very well on foot."

"But it is some distance," urged Geneviève, "and it is all up-hill. And you look tired."

The man wavered. "Yes, mademoiselle," he answered, "I have had a long walk, and I am very tired, and—"

He did not end his sentence; but his face finished it for him so plainly with the words "very hungry" that there was no need for this humiliating admission to be put into language.

He did not require much more persuasion; and indeed, from the air of utter exhaustion with which he fell back upon the cushions and the violent fit of coughing which presently over-

took him, Geneviève much doubted whether he would have been able to mount the hill without assistance. He scarcely spoke again, except to inform her that his name was Hirsch (not a very aristocratic one, to be sure), that he was, as she had surmised, a Russian subject, and that he had had the honor of knowing the Princess Ouranoff for many years; but she noticed that his hands were clean and white, like a gentleman's, and her woman's heart being touched by his forlorn aspect, she would have asked him to dine and offered him a room for the night, had she not feared that such an invitation might be subsequently ignored by her father.

Mr. Gervis, however, received the shabby stranger with his usual cold urbanity, and, to Geneviève's great relief, showed himself equal to the necessities of the occasion at all events in so far as meat and drink were concerned.

"We shall be sitting down to dinner in a quarter of an hour," he said. "Perhaps M. Hirsch will join us, and any little matter of business we may have to discuss can be deferred until afterwards."

So M. Hirsch was conducted upstairs to a dressing-room, whither, by Geneviève's directions, a servant presently brought him some wine and biscuits with his hot water.

CHAPTER XII.

HOSPITALITY.

HAVING acted the good Samaritan's part towards this wretched, half-starved Hirsch, having picked him up by the roadside, placed him in her own pony-trap and restored him with creature comforts, Geneviève naturally considered the man as in some sort her peculiar property, and began to feel herself drawn towards him, as the thrush does towards the helpless, intruding cuckoo whose life depends upon her care. She arranged that he should sit beside her at the dinner-table; she addressed her conversation to him, instead of to Freddy Croft, who was seated at her left hand; she tried to set him at his ease and to make him feel that he was admitted into the house as an equal, not upon sufferance only, as a beggar in disguise.

And this was the more creditable to her because closer scrutiny and a brighter light revealed the stranger as a decidedly unprepossessing person. His cast of countenance was that of the habitual criminal. A retreating forehead, deep-set, colorless eyes, which winked and blinked perpetually, a certain

undefinable covert impudence, veiled under an exaggerated humility of address—every detail of the man's manner and appearance, from his dust-colored hair, cropped closely *à la brosse*, to his stooping shoulders and his crafty sidelong glance, seemed to breathe of penal servitude. But the worst thing about M. Hirsch was that in proportion as his outer man became refreshed with food and wine, his humility showed signs of deserting him. He grew garrulous, praised Geneviève's costume, criticised adversely the style of dress in vogue among English ladies in general, let fall some observations about insular self-sufficiency, and interruped Mr. Flemyng, who had been reading an article entitled "Constitutional Prerogative," and was giving a synopsis of the same for the benefit of the ill-informed, by a curt remark to the effect that the British monarchy was doomed.

"Sir," said Mr. Flemyng grandly, "when you are better acquainted with this country you will discover that sedition is practically a thing unknown among us, and you will learn to abstain from language which in all classes of English society is apt to be resented as a personal affront."

This ought to have crushed him; but it did not. He shrugged his shoulders, with a short, disagreeable laugh. "The majority will always support institutions that exist," said he. "Once the sovereign is deposed and the constitution has fallen to pieces, the majority will be composed of very good republicans."

"The British Crown and the British Constitution will never fall," remarked Gervis solemnly, from the other end of the table. "We have Mr. Flemyng's word for it; and the subject is one which Mr. Flemyng has studied in all its bearings. Indeed, I have heard it whispered—though perhaps I ought not to say so—that the able article which he has been quoting is from his own pen."

"No, no, I assure you!" cried Mr. Flemyng, waving his hand deprecatingly, but looking vastly pleased. "There is ability in the article—great ability; and the writer's facts are indisputable and clearly put; but many of his deductions are such as I should hesitate to subscribe to. I have always been a Liberal myself—I may add an advanced Liberal—possibly too advanced a one for the age. Still, I can conscientiously say that disloyalty of the nature suggested by Mr.—er—by your friend has never entered into my speculations for the future."

"One can't tell what Gladstone may do though, if he gets the chance," observed Claud. "I confess I don't understand Mr. Gladstone."

"It is a common thing in these days," said Mr. Flemyng

raising his voice, "to hear men complain that they 'do not understand' Mr. Gladstone. Just so the Papal consistory 'did not understand' Galileo, the Athenians of old 'did not understand' Aristides, and, to come down to our own era, the English people of twenty years back 'did not understand' the Prince Consort. I would ask those who thus bring what they imagine to be an accusation, whether the fault may not lie rather with their own comprehension than with the statesman whose intellect it fails to grasp. Of this they may rest assured, that when the history of the nineteenth century comes to be perused by generations yet unborn, the name of Gladstone will be seen written across it in letters of imperishable light, while those of many who now strut the world's stage, decked in the pride of a brief authority, will have passed forever into those shades of oblivion whither pretentious mediocrity and self-seeking timidity inevitably tend."

This noble peroration had the effect of causing subdued smiles and meaning glances to be interchanged all round the table; and Freddy Croft, who was drinking a glass of wine at the time, choked himself and left the room with a hasty unsteady step. The truth is that it was taken *verbatim* from the tag-end of a leading article, which some one had designedly left in a conspicuous place on the library table. It was an innocent pastime of Mr. Gervis's to lay traps of this kind for his loquacious neighbor, who, with a little management, could always be led to walk into them, and whom a love of high sounding words would sometimes betray into eulogizing opposing men and measures almost in one and the same breath.

Geneviève on the present occasion lost the joke, her attention being engaged by M. Hirsch, who had dropped politics, and was discoursing glibly upon the manifold charms of the Princess Ouranoff.

"You are very fond of Madame la Princesse? Needless to say that, mademoiselle; who can resist her? So much beauty! so much elegance! a heart so generous! For the rest, it is not surprising that she should possess your affection, having such exceptional claims of age and relationship. It is as if one should say a mother and a sister in one. Charming!"

"Is it long since you saw Varinka last?" asked Geneviève, not much pleased with M. Hirsch's familiarity, yet hardly knowing how to check it.

"Long? Oh yes it is many years. But I have not been without news of my old friend. I say my old friend, because there was a time when I knew the Princess Ouranoff very well —intimately. I do not think that when we meet again, she

will need that I should tell her my name– oh no; I think she will not ask me to do that."

Something in the notion seemed to tickle him; for he laughed softly to himself, showing his sharp, discolored teeth.

"But the time I speak of is long ago," he resumed presently. "The world goes round; friends part; new ties are formed. One does not forget the friends of former years; but one cannot always be with them. I have scarcely even seen the Princess since her second marriage, and curiously enough, mademoiselle, I have never until this evening beheld your papa."

"Except at Wiesbaden, in the summer of 1860," put in Mr. Gervis quietly.

The ex-diplomatist had a peculiar power of listening to two or more conversations at the same time. He had also a remarkable faculty of throwing his voice, so that he could make himself heard across wide intervening spaces. That languid voice traveled down the long table now with marvellous distinctness, and the effect of it was not only to cause the flush on M. Hirsch's thin cheeks to vanish very quickly, but also to arrest the tongues of the rest of the company, who doubtless felt some pardonable curiosity as to the antecedents of this out-at-elbows foreigner. Amid a general silence the stranger bent forward to face his host, his eyes blinking more rapidly than ever, and his features expressing innocent surprise.

"Mr. Gervis makes a mistake," he said. "I was never at Wiesbaden in all my life."

"That is curious," remarked Gervis; "because my memory so very rarely deceives me. I was misled, I suppose, by a strong resemblance, and also by the circumstance that the person whom I recollect was, like M. Hirsch, a Russian. I believe, though, now I come to think of it, that he did not bear the name of Hirsch—which, indeed, does not strike me as having a Slavonic ring."

"I am a Courländer by birth," said the other quickly.

"Ah, indeed? Mr. Flemyng, I am afraid I interrupted you in the middle of a most entertaining anecdote. Pray do not deprive us of the end of it."

A general hum of talk began once more; but poor M. Hirsch's peace of mind was evidently destroyed. He drank no more wine; he scarcely pretended to eat; he no longer addressed his neighbor familiarly, but in the timid, cringing manner which had at first aroused her pity. Looking more than ever like an escaped convict, he appeared to recognize in his host the detective who might at any moment ruin him by a word. And that terrible Gervis, perceiving this, amused himself by tormenting the unfortunate man, dropping upon him, when he

least expected it, with some polite innuendo, some double-edged commonplace, the meaning of which, to Geneviève's ears, was clearly enough—"My good man, you are not simple enough to imagine that you can take me in, are you? Surely you don't suppose that I believe your name to be Hirsch, or that I am not acquainted with all the incidents of your disreputable career. Spare yourself the trouble of telling more lies; we understand one another. You want money; I have plenty of it; and I know you are mean enough and hungry enough to allow yourself to be kicked while you pick up the gold."

Geneviève thought she understood it all, and her heart swelled with silent indignation. Her father's habit of gratifying his caustic humor at the expense of his guests seemed to her a breach of all the laws of honor and hospitality. She had never been able to derive any amusement from the spectacle of poor Mr. Flemyng egged on to make a fool of himself in public; and to make merry over fallen humanity by distributing simultaneous alms and insults was to her mind as sorry a sport as a gentleman could well indulge in. This luckless and unattractive Hirsch might very possibly be a rogue; but who could tell what his temptations might have been? He was at all events ill, weary and in want; and why should any one wish to degrade him further than need be? With such thoughts as these passing through her mind, Geneviève forgot the free-and-easy carriage of her neighbor which had offended her a little earlier in the evening, and by treating him thenceforth with marked friendliness, tried to make some amends for her father's lack of courtesy. And the man was not ungrateful. When Geneviève rose to leave the room, he bent towards her, and said in a low voice, "You have been very kind to me, mademoiselle—to me, who am not accustomed to kindness. I shall not forget."

Along the south front of the house at Southlands runs a broad terrace walk, on which many benches and chairs are generally left; a walk to be avoided during the daytime, when the sun beats full upon it, but cool and pleasant when the night breezes blow up the valley from the sea, and fragrant with the scent of rose and sweet-brier, jasmine and mignonette. Thither, instead of to the drawing-room, the ladies betook themselves on this sultry night; and there they were joined, ere long, by three out of the five men whom they had left at the dinner-table. Poor Miss Potts, sitting disconsolately apart, wrapped in a gloomy reverie of which the subject may be divined by the reader, experienced a temporary return of cheerfulness when she saw Mr. Flemyng bearing down upon her. That great genius had lately discovered the veneration

in which he was held by the humble lady-companion, and, in default of a better listener, sometimes deigned to favor her with one of his exhaustive disquisitions. The party divided itself quite naturally into groups of two; for it had now become a matter of course that, upon every available opportunity, Freddy should pair off with Geneviève, and Claud with Nina.

The latter couple soon strolled away into the darkness, and were lost to sight. Silently they paced, side by side, along the gravel walks, past clumps of rhododendrons and azaleas, and across a broad space of sloping lawn. Their intimacy had reached that perilous stage in which long periods of speechlessness play so important a part. Halting at length beside the iron fence which separates the garden from the park, Nina dropped the opera-cloak which she had been carrying upon the topmost rail, and resting her bare arms upon it, abstractedly contemplated the shadowy prospect of hill, wood and valley that ended, far beneath her feet, in a vague fusion of sea and sky; while Claud turned his back upon the view, and, with folded arms, gazed at the gazer.

"Have you read those two volumes of poems I gave you?" he asked abruptly, after these respective attitudes had been maintained for several minutes.

"Yes," she answered, turning her head, so as to meet his eyes; "I have read them both over and over again."

"Really? You liked them then?"

"I thought them quite perfect. I don't know when I have read anything that delighted me so much."

"Do you say that to please me, or because you mean it?"

"Of course because I mean it. Have you not found out yet that I *always* mean what I say?"

"Well, I don't know," said Claud. "I suppose you find, as everybody else does, that it is impossible to practice an invariable sincerity without hurting some one's feelings; and after my having told you that the author of those lines was a particular friend of mine, you could hardly call them 'melodious twaddle,' could you?"

"Why not? Your friend might be the best fellow in the world, and a poor poet. But nobody, except an idiot, could possibly speak of his work in that way.'

"Then the critic who devoted ten lines to *Here and There* in the *Saturday Review* is an idiot. I must confess that I suspected as much before; but it is pleasant to have one's opinion confirmed. Miss Flemyng, if I were to let you into a great secret—a secret which I have never yet divulged to any one—do you think you could keep it?"

"I think," answered Nina demurely, "that I could."

"Well, then—I am trembling all over; but I made up my mind that I would tell you, and sooner or later the plunge must be taken—the author of those miserable little attempts at poetry was—myself."

"Oh, yes, I knew that," observed Nina composedly.

"*Did* you?" Claud was not a little mortified. "I feel exactly as if I had been trying to let off a damp firework," said he, making light of his discomfiture as best he could. "I thought I was going to astonish you, and now it is you who have astonished me. Would you mind telling me what made you guess that 'Clement Gerard' and I were one and the same person?"

"It was so difficult to guess, was it not?" returned Nina, laughing. "There are such numbers of people about who can write verses in French and English, and who bear the initials of C. G. And besides, I think I should always recognize any writing of yours," she added softly, laying just enough of emphasis upon the last word to send an agreeable thrill through the poet's whole person.

Claud had inherited from his Italian mother a really magnificent pair of soft dark-brown eyes, the use of which, as a means of expressing things unutterable, he had only recently begun to discover. He now raised these speaking orbs to the gray ones of Miss Flemyng, who, I dare say, found it no less easy to read their language than she had done to put a name to the writer who disguised himself under the pseudonym of Clement Gerard. Another long period of silence was broken by Nina.

"Don't you feel very proud?" she asked.

"Of what? Of having found publishers willing to print my rubbish? They are wretched stuff, and nobody knows it better than I do: but, having launched them upon the world, I couldn't resist the temptation of showing them to you. And you did actually find some of them just readable?" hazarded Claud once more, with that mixture of self-depreciation and hunger for the praise of others which commonly characterizes young authors.

"I have read them lots and lots of times," answered Nina; "and I think they are very, very good—*awfully* good."

"Then I am more than satisfied," Claud declared. "I would rather have heard you say that than have seen my poor little book driven into a second and third edition by the praise of all the critics in England."

"You think so now, perhaps; you won't think so this time next year."

The young man was going to protest; but Nina stopped him

by lifting up one of her little hands. "Please don't swear that you will consider my good opinion the one thing in the world worth having as long as you live. It would be very nice if that sort of thing could be true; but unfortunately it can't, you know. The melancholy fact is that, a year hence—or, to be well within the mark, we will say two years hence—you will not care a straw whether I like your poems or not. More than that, I shall not care whether you care."

"That may be true as regards you; but not as regards me."

"Oh yes, it will; do you think I don't know? *Tout lasse, tout passe.* We are what we are, not what we should like to be; and perhaps, if the truth were known, it would be rather a bore to live in a world inhabited by unchangeable people. Anyhow, we both care this evening, which is the principal thing; and I want to hear all about your book. What made you publish it in two languages? I think I like the French version best."

"So do I," said Claud. "For want of something better to do, I used to scribble verses from time to time, when I was wandering about the world with the governor; and I always wrote in French, which is easier to me in composition than English—I suppose because I have learnt it more thoroughly. That simultaneous publication in both languages was a trick to attract the public. 'Par-ci, par-là; par Clément Gérard,'—*Here and There*, by Clement Gerard,—I thought it would puzzle people, and make them wonder what nationality the gifted author could own. So, when I began to collect my stray songs and sonnets and what not, I did them into English *tant bien que mal*, with the result that you see. I am bound to say that the public has not as yet displayed as much agitation upon the subject as it might have done. My Paris publishers tell me that the first edition of the work is nothing like exhausted; and as for the London firm, I have not dared so much as to ask them how many copies of *Here and There* remain on their hands after three months of patient advertising. They sent me, yesterday morning, the number of the *Saturday Review* in which my immortal work is summarily disposed of, among a host of others, under the heading of 'Minor Notices.' Minor Notices indeed! isn't it scandalous? Of course I cut the page out, though; and here it is, if you would like to see it. 'Mr. Clement Gerard's little volume is one which it would be cruel to criticise too severely. In an age which witnesses the daily production of reams of twaddle calling itself poetry, one can but be thankful for such twaddle as will rhyme and scan . . . Mr. Gerard has evidently bestowed much pains upon his work; and, if he will in future devote as great a measure of his atten

tion to matter as he has in this instance done to manner, he may—' etc., etc. Not a word about M. Clément Gérard, and his phenomenal command *utriusque linguæ*, you see. Somehow or other, that gun seems to have missed fire, and I don't even get the credit of twaddling agreeably for the benefit of two great nations."

"Have you got a light about you?" asked Nina. And, having hastily perused the brief notice by the aid of a wax match which Claud struck—"Now," said she, "I am going to burn the thing;" and promptly suited the action to the word.

"There! And I wish I could burn the fool of a reviewer into the bargain! I don't believe he ever read the poems at all. Don't let us waste another thought upon him. Why did you never tell me before that you wrote?"

"I was too timid," answered Claud. "I did not think it would interest you to hear that I had published some tenth-rate rhymes."

"How silly you are! If there is a thing I have a weakness for, it is genius; and, oddly enough, I have never associated on anything like terms of intimacy with a single literary man, except Mr. Knowles, who sometimes writes for magazines, I believe, and who is anything but good company. I often meet him at dinners in London; and I have observed that he is invariably silent and rather shy until the champagne has been round twice; after which he becomes dictatorial, snubs his neighbors, and talks at such a pace that nobody else has a chance to get a word in edgeways."

(I am unwilling to break the continuity of the narrative; but really I cannot allow this abominable accusation, which Claud was so kind as to repeat to me subsequently, to pass without a protest. It is as false as it is impertinent; and were it not that I have never taken sufficient interest in Miss Flemyng to speak of her otherwise than with perfect impartiality, I might record certain speeches, made behind her back, which—but no matter. I apologize for the parenthesis, and proceed with my history, the incidents of which I shall continue to report with passionless accuracy.)

"Mr. Knowles doesn't count," Nina went on; "he would never be anything but an old bore, even if he had written *Paradise Lost* or *In Memoriam*. But you are the first author whom I have known as a *friend;* and I can't, for the life of me, help feeling proud of you."

"It is delightful to hear you say so. Only you cannot really be proud of a friend who publishes mere twaddle."

"Nonsense! You know quite well your poems are not twaddle; they are lovely. What does Mr. Gervis say about them?"

"The governor? Good gracious! you don't suppose that I should dare to show the book to him, do you? I can see him reading it, convulsed with internal laughter, but preserving an imperturbably grave face, and complimenting me upon my unsuspected talent. No; the authorship of *Here and There* is a secret between you and me and the publishers; and please, I should like it to remain so. I shall never write any more doggerel."

"You will write some more poetry, I hope."

Claud shook his head. "It is a case of *non possumus*. If I ever do publish anything again, it shall be prose."

"What kind of prose do you mean?"

"Oh, I don't know. A novel, perhaps, or a play."

"That would be rather nice," said Nina thoughtfully. "I should enjoy being present on the first nights of your pieces. Yes, I think I should like you to be a successful play-writer."

There was a tacit assumption of proprietorship in this which Claud could not but feel to be flattering. "Perhaps I might be successful," he said, "if you wanted me to be so. At all events, with such an incentive, I would do the very best I could."

Miss Flemyng laughed under her breath; and Claud, in a slightly aggrieved voice, inquired the cause of her merriment.

"Oh, you will laugh too some day," she answered. "Hadn't we better be going back to tea now?"

Mentally recapitulating this conversation, some hours later, in the solitude of his chamber, Claud was vexed by many misgivings. He was not sure that the Saturday Reviewer's estimate of *Here and There* was an unjust one; he was not sure that he had done wisely in divulging his secret; he was disposed to think that he had talked a great deal too much about his own affairs in the course of the evening.

> "And further, thinks I to myself, I'll be shot
> If I know whether Nina adores me or not,"

concluded the poet, paraphrasing Mr. Locker as he blew out his candle, and got into bed.

CHAPTER XIII.

TWO DIALOGUES.

IF, in the course of the interview just described, Claud and Miss Flemyng had turned their eyes towards the hilltop behind them, instead of alternately studying one another's faces and the ground, they would have seen, standing out in

bold relief against the sky, two dark figures, whose relative attitudes corresponded exactly to their own. For the lawns and shrubberies that encircle Southlands abound in winding walks; and although when young men and maidens saunter out by twos in the gloaming, all paths are likely, figuratively speaking, to lead towards the same point, it is well for the comfort of those concerned that they need not invariably do so in a literal sense.

It was probably a firm conviction of this truth that caused Freddy Croft to set his face in a northerly direction, on perceiving whither the couple which had got the start of him was bound. It was repugnant to his feelings to climb a steep hill immediately after dinner; but of two evils this was so plainly the less, that he accepted it cheerfully, saying—

"Do you mind which way we go, Miss Gervis? If it is quite the same thing to you, I should like to try and get a whiff of fresh air up there behind the house. It is rather stifling down below, don't you think?"

Geneviève signified that it was quite the same thing to her; and accordingly they toiled up a series of irregular zigzags, wasting little breath in speech, until they reached the boundary of the pleasure-grounds, beyond which stretched broad fields of wheat and oats and barley that swayed and rustled, as the light wind from the moors swept over them.

Here Geneviève paused, and resting her arms upon the paling, fell into much the same posture as that in which Miss Flemyng was standing, some hundred feet below; while Freddy, whose native graces were hardly equal to Claud's, perched himself upon the barrier and whistled softly, swinging his legs to and fro.

"Rather a bore my getting swamped this afternoon," he began presently, by way of starting the conversation. "I can't think how I managed to do such an idiotic thing. Didn't you all laugh when you saw me floundering about in the water?"

"I did not hear any one laugh," answered Geneviève. "I thought you were going to be drowned."

"No fear. I didn't care a farthing about losing the race—though I do wish that butter-and-eggs chap hadn't won it—but it *was* rather hard lines to be done out of my drive home with you."

Geneviève did not respond. She seemed to be a little out of spirits; and Freddy, watching her as she abstractedly pulled tufts of moss and lichen from the bar of the wooden fence on which she was leaning, had his doubts as to whether she was listening to him at all.

"You must have taken it easy up the hill," he resumed. "I had time to change all my clothes, and to walk down nearly as far as the lodge to meet you, before you appeared.'

"Had you?"

"Yes; but it wasn't much good, after all, was it? As soon as I saw you had got another passenger on board I retired gracefully among the trees. You didn't see me, did you?"

"No," answered Geneviève. "I am sorry you had the walk for nothing."

"Ah, so was I sorry; but I wasn't surprised. Luck always goes in runs, and this doesn't seem to have been my day, somehow. Where did you pick up Mister Rags?"

"Please don't say disagreeable things about him," pleaded Geneviève. "I can't bear to hear people sneered at because they are poor and shabby; and it is not like you to notice such things. How many of the best men that ever lived have often been in want of money!"

"I beg your pardon," said Freddy humbly. "I had not the least intention of saying anything offensive about him, and I dare say he is a—a very good fellow, when you come to know him. Of course, any friend of yours—"

"He is not my friend. I never saw him before to-day: and I am not sure that I like him particularly. Only it vexed me that everybody should despise him just because he wore a shabby coat."

"Indeed I did not despise him," Freddy declared.

"Well, you would not take any notice of him; and all the others looked at him as if they thought he wanted to pick their pockets. And yet, even if he had been a professional thief, they ought not to have let him see that he was suspected. At least, that is my idea of hospitality. I don't know whether it is yours."

The worldly-wise Freddy replied that Miss Gervis was too generous. Of course every man was innocent until he was proved guilty, and all that sort of thing; but at the same time, there were lots of sharps about, and if one didn't keep one's eyes open, one was safe to be done, you know. He added, somewhat inconsequently, that these remarks were not intended to bear a personal application.

"If I believed a man to be what you call a 'sharp,' I would not ask him to dine with me," said Geneviève; "but, if I had asked a man to dinner, I should think that I was insulting my guests, as well as him, by showing him that I took him for a sharp."

"Oh, I see," said Freddy, "you mean what your father said. The old gentleman did give him one or two nasty ones, cer-

tainly. At least, I suppose he did. I didn't understand what it was all about myself; only I saw the fellow wriggling and looking uncomfortable. However, you need not be unhappy about it; there's no harm done. Mr. Gervis began to talk to old Rags—I beg your pardon; M. Hirsch, I mean—directly you had gone out of the room; and when we left them they were getting on like a house on fire."

"Do you think," asked Geneviève suddenly, "that it is a very dreadful thing to dislike one's own father? But of course it must be. It is horrible and wicked, and against nature, and yet—"

"Oh, I don't think so at all," said Freddy serenely. "If a man is a brute, he must take the consequences."

"He is not quite that."

"What, Mr. Gervis? Oh, of course not; I did not mean him. But some fellows' governors are regular brutes; no other word for them. There's a man I know in the Guards—an awfully good fellow—whose father is worth half a million, if he's worth a penny. Well, you'd hardly believe it, but that old ruffian allows his son—an eldest son, mind you—three hundred a year besides his pay; and a few months ago, what does he do but sticks a notice in the papers saying he won't be responsible for any debts poor Jack may contract! Now an old screw like that is bound to be hated. Can't expect anything else, you know."

Here was a strange kind of confidant for Miss Gervis, whom her few intimates were wont to accuse of excessive reticence, to have chosen; but in the lives of all men and women there are moments in which sympathy seems almost a necessity; and a combination of circumstances, which it would be tedious, and perhaps superfluous, to enumerate, had now brought such a moment to our heroine. It must be remembered too, that Freddy had, in her estimation, shown himself to be a true and disinterested friend, and that reserved natures seldom bestow their confidence by halves. She passed by his irrelevant reference to the ill-used guardsman, and went on, following her own line of thought:

"It is my fault, I suppose, that we have never got on together. Claud hits it off with him very well, though he sees all the things that I see and knows all that I know—and more, perhaps. Claud makes allowances; I can't. I must either like people very much or dislike them very much; and I am afraid it makes no difference whatever to me whether they are my relations or not. In those whom I love I believe I could pardon anything—any cruelty, or wickedness, or neglect—it would not make me change; but it is not in me to

love any one from a sense of duty; and if I do not love, I—do the reverse."

"That is just the character of all others that I would have myself, if I could choose," cried Freddy with enthusiasm.

"No," answered Geneviève, rather sadly, "I don't think anybody would choose to be like that; only perhaps it may be some excuse for me that one has no choice in the matter. If my father were ill, and I could nurse him, or if he were in any trouble, and I could help him, I would do it because he is my father—but to be fond of him because he is my father—no; that is impossible."

"Has he been treating you unkindly?" Freddy asked, sliding off the paling on to his feet, and looking quite fierce at the bare idea of such atrocity.

"No; he is never unkind to me; he is even kind, after a fashion, though I don't think it would distress him in the least if I were to die to-night. But there are others to whom he is not only unkind, but positively cruel. I don't know whether you will understand what I mean; but you know how cruel children often are. Claud and I used to torture our dogs in all kinds of ways; and I remember our once putting a cat in walnut-shells and laughing till the tears ran down our cheeks at the absurd way the poor thing floundered about on the polished *parquet*."

"I have always delighted in seeing a pig killed myself," interjected Freddy meditatively.

"We got into great trouble about the cat. I dare say we were thoughtless, heartless little wretches in many ways; but I know that when some friends took us to see those horrible serpents at the Jardin des Plantes fed upon live birds and rabbits, we could not bear it, and we both ran away, crying as if our hearts would break. There was one boy who staid and saw it all. I abhorred that boy ever afterwards. He is a man now, and I abhor him still."

"I think I see what you mean," said Freddy, stroking his fair mustache reflectively. "It makes a lot of difference whether a fellow is cruel without meaning it, or in the way of sport, and that, or whether he is cruel because he likes it."

"Yes; it is a horrible thing to enjoy the sight of suffering. So far as the hatefulness of the enjoyment is concerned, I can't see that it matters much whether the pain is bodily or mental, or even whether the amount of it is great or small. It seems to me that there is not much to choose between a boy who sticks pins through living butterflies, for the pleasure of watching their dying struggles, and a man whose chief amusement is to hurt people's feelings or to make them look ridiculous.

Only the boy is whipped and sent to bed, whereas the man is admired and applauded as a wit."

"But don't you think," began Freddy, with some hesitation —for he was wavering between a strong habitual bias in favor of giving the devil his due and an equally strong disinclination to connect his feminine ideal with the remotest suspicion of injustice—"don't you think that you are a little bit hard upon Mr. Gervis? I mean to say, things might hurt your feelings, you know, which wouldn't trouble other people for a moment. Some fellows have such precious thick hides! Look at me, for instance. He might go on chaffing, if it amused him, till all was blue, and I shouldn't care a rap."

"That is partly because you are too kind-hearted yourself to believe that any one could really mean to vex you," said Geneviève, laughing a little, "and partly because he hasn't it in his power to hurt you seriously. If you were in the position of that poor man whom he is tormenting at this moment you would understand him better. But I know what you must think of me for saying all this; and you are quite right. There are things which ought never to be said, whether they are true or not."

Upon this Freddy took the opportunity of stating his opinion of Miss Gervis with much warmth and a free use of superlatives; and so the dialogue took a turn more interesting to the speakers, but less so, perhaps, to the outer world. The reader's heart is, in all probability, harder than Geneviève's, and is not likely to suffer any very severe pangs if he is asked to return for a few minutes to the dining-room, and to look on at the supposed martyrdom of M. Hirsch.

No sooner had Mr. Flemyng's bulky form disappeared through the glass doors that opened upon the terrace than that gentleman drew his chair a little closer to his host's, and pouring out a glass of clâret for himself with a mixture of bravado and nervousness, proceeded straight to business.

"You will understand, Mr. Gervis," he began, "that I should not have been so bold as to make my way into your house unless I had had a communication to make to you."

Gervis inclined his head slightly.

"Sir, I will be frank with you; I will conceal nothing."

"Thank you very much," said Mr. Gervis sweetly. "May I offer you a cigarette?"

The stranger accepted the proffered civility, lighted his cigarette with a rather shaky hand, and resumed:

"I want money; I prefer to say so at once. You will perhaps think me a blackguard—"

A slight gesture of Mr. Gervis's hand seemed to express polite acquiescence.

"Mon dieu! it is not I who shall contradict you; but when one is reduced to starvation, and when one has information which is worth money, one does not give it away. You will have guessed at once that what I have to say refers to the Princess Ouranoff—your wife. Ah, sir, that woman has treated me abominably!—horribly! For all these years I have been her friend; I would have been her friend still—yes! her friend, sir, and not yours; for it has been my weakness to sacrifice duty to compassion—but the time has now come when I can no longer be silent. Only three days ago I arrived from South America. I landed at Southampton with only three shillings in my pocket; I have walked from thence to this place, living on crusts of bread, sleeping in barns—in ditches—where I could; and now, what do I find? That she has gone away; that she is in France, amusing herself with her gay friends; that she has not so much as left a message for me; that she is out of my reach. I was hungry; I was half dead with fatigue; I felt all my strength leave me—what could I do?"

The man's voice broke; and he paused for a moment, with an emotion which appeared to be genuine enough.

"M. Hirsch," said Gervis, "you distress me. Pray help yourself. And so the Princess refused to pay any more blackmail?"

For an instant the expression of M. Hirsch's face changed. A vicious look showed itself about the corners of his mouth and a gleam shot from between his blinking eyelids. He took some more claret, however, and continued:

"You put things in plain language, Mr. Gervis. After all, why not? *J'aime autant ça.* On my side, I will avail myself of the same privilege. I may tell you that the story of your married life is no secret to me. I know that for years past you have only been the husband of the Princess Ouranoff in name. I know that you have had many suspicions, but no proofs. I know that you would give much to be rid, once and for all, of the woman who has deceived and disgraced you. Is it not so?"

Gervis laid his head on one side, and surveyed his interlocutor with a certain pensive curiosity, but said nothing.

"Now," proceeded M. Hirsch, taking silence for consent, "supposing that I had it in my power to insure you absolute freedom from her as soon as you please?"

"How much," inquired Gervis in his blandest tones, "how much, my dear sir, did you think of asking for this priceless boon?"

"Twenty thousand pounds sterling—neither more nor less," answered the other firmly. "It is a large sum; but you are a

rich man; and liberty is worth that, and more than that, to you. Moreover, you would actually economize by the transaction, I believe; for what is the interest of twenty thousand pounds at five per cent? A mere thousand a year, is it not? I shall be much surprised to hear that the Princess Ouranoff has not cost you more than that, beyond her private fortune, for some years past."

"M. Hirsch, it is evident that I can keep nothing back from you; and really your moderation astonishes me. But has it not occurred to you that, if the conclusive evidence which you hint at exists, I might possibly obtain it without your aid, and so save my twenty thousand?"

"Impossible, Mr. Gervis. You may take it as absolutely certain that unless you regain your liberty through me you will never regain it at all. I am the only man living who holds the requisite proofs. For the rest, you have but to remember how long it is that you have been searching high and low in vain for what you want in order to see that this is not a case in which detectives and spies can be of any service to you."

"Too true! And you really will not take less than twenty thousand pounds?"

"Sir, I have said it. I am a man of my word. See now, Mr. Gervis, I will place myself in your hands without reserve. With half a dozen words I will undertake to convince you of the truth of my statement; I will rely upon your honor then to hand me a check, a promissory note, or what you will, for the money; and in a few weeks' time, at furthest, proofs which no court of law could withstand for one moment shall be in your hands. Is it a bargain?"

"Ah well, M. Hirsch," said Gervis, throwing the end of his cigarette out of the window, "you are a shocking rascal, I am afraid; but your impudence has afforded me some little amusement. Will you have any more wine, or shall we join the ladies now?"

"What is the meaning of this? Please to speak plainly, sir," returned the other in a hoarse voice. His eyelids had stopped blinking; two vertical lines had appeared on his retreating forehead; his pointed chin was slightly thrust forward. He presented altogether as striking a type of the born assassin as any physiognomist could wish to study.

"Why, the meaning of it, my good creature," replied Mr. Gervis, "is simply that your little plan has failed. In forming it, you appear to have forgotten, or to have been ignorant of, two trifling circumstances—firstly, that you were speaking to a gentleman, and secondly, that you were not speaking to an

absolute fool. I am not going to say anything indignant about your attacks upon the character of an absent lady—still less about the flattering estimate which you seem to have formed of my own morality. I very rarely allow myself to be angry—never with persons of your description. You will admit that it would be hardly worth my while. What I should have thought might have been patent to you is, that I should never believe, or pay for, a single word that you uttered, whether supported by what you call proof or not. I remember you quite well at Wiesbaden, where you entered yourself in the visitors' book at the hotel under I forget what Russian name ending in *off* or *eff*. Doubtless it was not your own—if that signified. Do you know, M. Hirsch, that the only hopeful symptom I have observed in your case is that you are by no means an accomplished liar."

The languid drawl with which these sentences were enunciated more than doubled their insulting significance. The stranger whose face had turned as white as the table-cloth before him, lost all control over his passion. Trembling, and muttering a curse, he leapt to his feet, and caught up a knife that lay beside his plate.

The next instant, his right arm was thrown up above his head and held there powerless in a firm grasp, while the knife was jerked out of his hand on to the floor. Mr. Gervis let him go at once, and fell back in his chair, laughing heartily.

"M. Hirsch, you are the most comical ruffian I ever encountered. Are you aware that you have been threatening my life with a dessert-knife? Never mind; your intentions were good; and if I did not happen to be tolerably strong in the wrists still, in spite of my age, I dare say you might have startled me. As it is, I have to thank you for a dramatic finish to a most entertaining evening."

The man was cowed—as much, perhaps, by the ridicule of his host as by the consciousness that he was too physically weak to be formidable to anybody. "Will you allow me," he asked humbly, "to say a few more words upon the subject which—"

"Thank you, no," answered Mr. Gervis. "On the contrary, if you so much as allude to it again, I shall ring the bell, and tell the servants to turn you out at the front door."

"That shall not be necessary," said M. Hirsch, rising. "You are a hard man, Mr. Gervis; but you are not so clever as you think yourself. I wish you good evening."

He had his hand upon the door-handle when Mr. Gervis stopped him. "Wait one moment, M. Hirsch. Where do you propose to sleep to-night?"

The man shrugged his shoulders silently.

"Please to sit down. I will be with you again directly."

Mr. Gervis left the room, and presently returned, with his slow, weary step, holding a bundle of bank-notes in his hand. "Here are fifty pounds," said he; "it is all the spare cash I have by me. Rascality, M. Hirsch, arises mainly out of adverse circumstances. The human family is composed of members of various shades and colors; and with a slight effort I find that I can recognize in you an erring brother. With this money you will at least be able to find your way to the Princess, whom you will no doubt bully for more. I am sorry I can't see my way to protecting her from you. I am sorry, also, that I cannot offer you a bed; but conventionality must be respected up to a certain point. Good-by. Don't let me see you again, please."

M. Hirsch looked at Gervis and looked at the notes. Necessity has no law. He took them, without a word of acknowledgment, and went away.

"Poor devil!" mused Gervis aloud, lighting another cigarette, as he heard the hall-door slam behind his late visitor. "I dare say he knows something. Or was it only the old story perhaps? To think of his taking up a silver knife to me—ha, ha, ha! I wonder now whether, if I had been in his place, I should have chosen to accept that money or starve. Dear me, what a farce it all is, to be sure!"

CHAPTER XIV.

MR. FLEMYNG'S DAHLIAS.

A BACHELOR friend of mine, who was once highly susceptible to feminine charms, but has now reached a period of life at which he can view the agitations of bygone days in the calm light of reason, and analyze them with a mixture of self-pity and self-complacency, is fond of broaching a theory to the effect that there is some intimate connection between the progress of the tender passion and the course of the seasons. It has invariably been so, he says, in his own case. Upon each occasion he has felt the first stirrings of his heart in the spring; the summer has seen him falling more and more deeply in love; September and the partridges have brought him the first faint symptoms of a diminution of the fever; with October a perceptible coolness has set in; and he has been quite his own man again at the commencement of the hunting season. Warned by repeated experiences of this nature, he has learnt, in all recent attacks, what to expect; and recognizing

the approach of the familiar malady has possessed his soul in patience, knowing full well that, with a little self-command, he will escape scathless, and live to see his illusions slowly waning with the waning of the year.

According to this authority, the month of August is the time when a prudent man should take most heed to his ways. It is a time of holiday-making for some, of idleness for nearly all; a time in which the common pursuits of men are very generally also those of women; a time of long days and warm, dry evenings. If this dangerous moment be but safely tided over, says my friend, there is good hope of the sufferer's recovery; and he professes to have observed that more engagements are announced in the course of the month in question than during any other four weeks of the year. My own experience does not enable me to indorse my friend's theory at all points; but I am inclined to go with him in that part of it which refers to the perils of August—and more especially a fine August.

Now it so fell out that the summer which witnessed the return of the Gervis family to England was an exceptional one. Day after day the sun shone down in his strength upon woodland and meadow and sea; what rain there was fell in short, sharp thunder-showers, and passed away; the peaches ripened a good fortnight before their time; on either side of the narrow field-paths the corn rose above a man's head; the nights were starry and still; and through it all Claud walked, as in a fool's paradise, vaguely rejoicing in the beauty of life, but seeing no object with any distinctness, save the graceful figure of Nina Flemyng.

A man who lives in a fool's paradise—by which, I take it, is meant an individual who, for the time being, has lost his bearings, and neither knows nor cares whither the sequence of events may be hurrying him—is doubtless, from the terms of the proposition, a fool. Yet, since some such failure of mental stability may be regarded as an almost necessary condition of love, and as the obvious deduction that all lovers must be fools is one which will hardly meet with universal acceptance, no special apology on this score seems needful on behalf of Claud, who indeed was by no means one of that class of person which, in a general way, allows itself to be ruled by circumstances rather than be at the pains of ruling them.

If he had lacked some one definite programme in life, the fault had not been his, but his father's, who, while debarring him from the exercise of a profession, had omitted to suggest to him any other outlet for surplus energy; but certain objects he had set before himself, and had worked up to patiently—such as the establishment of a home for his erratic father in

England, the closing of the chronic family breach, and the earning of a name for himself by means of literature. For all these things he had labored steadily, devoting himself to the last of them not so much because he felt any pressing vocation thereto as because it had appeared to him that he had no alternative between achieving success with his pen and existing as a mere loafer upon the face of the earth. Then fate had brought the course of his life into contact with that of Nina Flemyng; her fascinations had made a more or less easy conquest of his heart; and in regard to this matter it must be confessed that definiteness of aim had deserted him. Some people there are, no doubt, who, after the first discovery that their affections are engaged, begin with laudable prudence to forecast results, and seeing the altar and the domestic hearth looming sternly at the end of the pleasant path of courtship, ask themselves whether they shall advance or retreat while the option yet rests with them; but these have seldom a strain of southern blood in their veins. Claud vexed himself with no such dispassionate calculations. Matrimony was to him at most a vague possibility; a blissful dream which it would be almost a profanation to associate with considerations so commonplace as settlements, furniture, trousseaux, and the like. The essential matter was that Nina had become dearer to him than the whole world, and that his happiness must henceforth be made or marred by her alone.

Naturally, therefore, he spent a great part of his time at the Moated House, where his reception varied with the changing moods of its capricious young mistress, but where he was in any case sure of one unaffected welcome; for Mr. Flemyng had taken a fancy to the young fellow—as fathers of families not unfrequently do to young fellows of good expectations—and would often beg him to consider himself as in all respects one of the family, and to remember that there was a vacant place ready for him at the dinner-table whenever it might suit him to occupy it. A general invitation is by common repute equivalent to no invitation; but Claud did not take this narrow view of Mr. Flemyng's proffered hospitality, nor was he slow in finding one pretext or another for availing himself of it. Truth to tell, he dined, in those days, nearly as often at the Moated House as at Southlands, no man hindering him; for Mr. Gervis made it a rule never to remark upon the absence of an inmate of his household, or to put any of those embarrassing questions with which some injudicious parents persist in harassing their adult offspring.

Invading Mr. Flemyng's premises thus informally, one evening shortly after the Beachborough regatta-day, Claud found

his entertainer in a state of unwonted perturbation and excitement. The worthy gentleman's cheeks were flushed; his white hair, ordinarily so smoothly brushed, was ruffled; he was pacing to and fro with gestures indicative of anything but philosophic composure.

"An abominable outrage has been committed!" cried he, too eager to communicate the dreadful news to waste any time in preliminary forms of greeting. "Five-and-twenty years have I sat upon the bench as one of the justices of the peace for this county, and I have no hesitation in saying that for wanton, dastardly brutality, for diabolical ingenuity of conception and execution, this case is without a parallel in my experience. That I am myself the victim of this atrocious piece of wickedness is a minor matter: I put that consideration away from me. But this I will say, that a neighborhood in which such deeds can be perpetrated is an immoral neighborhood, a neighborhood which needs to be recalled to its senses by the strong arm of the law, and that I heartily regret that the powers intrusted to us do not authorize me to condemn the offender to—to corporal chastisement."

"When caught," added Nina, rather unfeelingly.

"Caught! If we had a constabulary worthy of the name he would have been in custody by now. If I had been informed of the facts before I left the house this morning, instead of having been, most improperly, kept in ignorance of them until an hour ago, it is more than probable that I should have been able to trace the fellow myself. But of course the footprints, which as evidence would have been simply invaluable, are carefully raked out before I am told. Persons who are guilty of such acts of stupidity are, to all intents and purposes, *particeps criminis*."

"What in the world has happened?" asked Claud.

"Why, some miscreant has stolen into my garden in the dead of the night, and has utterly destroyed the best part of my dahlias."

Claud was ill-advised enough to murmur, "Is that all?"

"*All!*. Upon my word! Well, really—" For once Mr. Flemyng's feelings were too deeply stirred to find relief in declamation. He could only snort, and wave his hands, speechlessly as if calling upon the higher powers to bear witness to the callousness of man.

Nina made a grimace at Claud, who hastened to apologize, explaining that he had feared that some more serious loss of property had befallen his friends; but Mr. Flemyng was not to be pacified all at once. The intrinsic value of the flowers was not, he confessed, very great, if measured by the mere vulgar

standard of market prices, though, to be sure, they had not been brought to their late state of perfection without some considerable outlay. But their worth as evidences of taste and skill, their worth, as a harmonious combination of colors, in delighting the eyes and elevating the minds of all beholders —their æsthetic worth, in short, if Mr. Flemyng made himself understood—this was something altogether beyond the scope of appraisement. Nevertheless, he went on to say, it was not so much the damage done as the manner in which it had been done that made his blood boil. Theft, Mr. Flemyng was pleased to say, that he could understand. Theft, though necessarily punishable by the laws which hold society together, was an offense for which the philosophic mind could readily conceive of sundry palliations. But this was no case of theft. The flowers, some broken off their stems, some torn up by their roots, had been found scattered in different parts of the garden. The inference was clear: an enemy had done this thing.

"Now I ask you," cried Mr. Flemyng, in conclusion, "what pretext have I ever given to any man, woman, or child in the county for behaving to me in such a disgraceful way? Whom have I injured? To whom have I not been, so far as in me lay, a benefactor? Can a single instance of harshness or injustice, public or private, be brought against me?"

With the irritability of a vain man, Mr. Flemyng went on putting this question in various forms for the next hour and a half. There could clearly be only one answer to it; but it was evident that there existed somewhere a perverse being who, if he could have been heard, would not have returned that true answer; and therein lay the sting. Mr. Flemyng's whole thinking power was so saturated with self-approbation, he had so firm and full a belief in himself as not only a wise but a beneficent creature, that any proof of the ill-will of his fellow-men shocked as much as it surprised him. The bare idea that such depravity could be was enough—not indeed to take away his appetite; for that was probably more than any calamity could achieve—but to considerably mar his gratification of it; and thus it fell out that he quarreled with his dinner, and made things very unpleasant for the attendant butler and footboy in the parentheses of an unending oration.

Claud, it is scarcely necessary to say, felt no great interest in Mr. Flemyng or his dahlias; but he had no objection at all to the philosopher's rolling periods, under cover of which, as the experience of many a previous evening had taught him, two persons who understood one another could interchange looks and murmured words quite satisfactorily.

So they three sat in the old oak-panneled dining-room, while the twilight deepened into darkness, and were content after their several fashions; and doubtless the butler, surveying them all with the calm eye of an outsider, derived some amusement from the various descriptions of folly exhibited by his superiors. "No fool like a *old* fool!"—such was his subsequent criticism upon the head of the establishment; and as for the remarks which he thought fit to indulge in with regard to his mistress, they were so wanting in proper respect that they shall not be recorded here.

Like many other good men, Mr. Flemyng was subject to an invincible and habitual drowsiness after dinner. Claud and Nina left him slumbering peacefully in the library, and betook themselves to that retired spot under the cedar-tree where, some weeks before, their acquaintance had taken so prompt a stride towards intimacy. It was a still, moonlight night, and the silence which comes with darkness was broken only by an occasional echo of laughter from the distant servants' hall, or when the harsh cry of a night-jar arose from the shrubbery behind the house.

"Have you ever an intense longing to be somebody else?" asked Nina suddenly.

"Well, no," answered Claud, "I don't think so. Have you?"

"Yes; nearly always. At the present moment, for instance, I would give anything to be you."

"You would make a poor exchange then," Claud remarked. "Why should you wish for such a thing?"

"Why? Because I suspect that you are thoroughly enjoying yourself. Because I believe that you are as nearly as possible happy and pleased with life, sitting here. The difference between us is that I am not."

Claud said he was very sorry to hear it. Should he go away?

"Don't be idiotic. You know quite well that I like talking to you; or, if you did not know it before, you are welcome to the information now. You remember how I shocked you, some time ago, by telling you that flirtation was one of my enjoyments; and if we are not flirting now, we are at all events doing what everybody calls flirting; which is a pleasant enough way of passing the time, as far as it goes. Only please abstain from saying pretty things and talking down to my level; otherwise you might as well be that plunger from Lynchester barracks, whose name I have forgotten—or anybody else. Don't you see that I am trying to rise to what papa calls 'an elevated strain of thought?' I am contemplating life as a whole; and that is why I say I should like to be you."

"I don't see why my life as a whole should seem better worth having than yours," said Claud.

"Nonsense! What can my life be?—what can any woman's life be? Even with the very best of luck—such as marrying a duke with £300,000 a year—there would be nothing to look forward to but year after year of monotony. But your life is your own to do what you like with. With your talents, you will soon make yourself famous; and as you have money and good looks and a tolerably pleasant manner into the bargain, there will be nothing to prevent you going out as much as you please in London and staying in the best houses in the country. And if, some morning, you wake up and discover that that sort of thing is becoming a great bore—as I know I should in your place—all you have to do is to start off for Texas to shoot buffaloes, or for India to stick pigs, or to the Arctic regions to look for the North Pole. And then, as soon as you have had enough of barbarism, you can come back to civilization again, and go in for whatever may happen to take your fancy at the time. Oh yes; men have the best of the game always and in everything."

"Well, perhaps," Claud admitted; "but the fact of being a man does not necessarily imply such absolute freedom; and as for me, I don't know that I care very much about absolute freedom, after all. I should not like to have no ties; and certainly I should be sorry to break those that keep me here."

"I know. I began by saying that I envied you because you were contented. Things as they are at present satisfy you. You ask for nothing better than to live like this, sailing, fishing, prawning, playing cricket and lawn-tennis all day, dining here in a quiet sort of way, and perhaps scribbling a few lines before you go to bed. Small blame to you!—it isn't a bad kind of life for summer weather; and when you weary of it, you can march on, and forget it."

"I think you know that I am not likely to forget these last weeks," said Claud; "and as for the life, I could never weary of it."

"What? do you mean to say that you would like to devote the remainder of your days to playing cricket and lawn-tennis, and catching whiting-pouts, and the rest of it?"

This certainly had not been Claud's meaning. What he had intended to imply was that he could never weary of Nina Flemyng; but the time seemed hardly ripe as yet for the expression in plain words of such a sentiment; or rather he exaggerated the probable effect of it, being little versed in women's ways, and without suspicion that his companion had listened to many much warmer protestations and had learned to estimate

them at their proper value. Claud, in fact, was still very young, and for all his knowledge of the world in a geographical sense, was barely beginning to make acquaintance with it socially. So all he said was—

"I don't want to be always idle, of course. No doubt I should tire of idleness, if that is what you mean. But I don't think you do mean only that when you talk as you are doing to-night. Your idea seems to be that, sooner or later, one must tire of everything—friends and all."

"Exactly: that is just my idea. There is only one thing on earth, I fancy, that never palls; and that is work. Man was born to labor and sorrow, you know; only the labor and the sorrow don't go together. You men, whatever you may say, love work. If you have a profession, you think about it a great deal more than about anything else; and if you haven't, you make some other occupation for yourselves: and that is your life. All the rest is mere interlude and by-play. But we women—at least, nine out of every ten of us—have no occupation; for I don't call housekeeping and looking after troublesome brats an occupation; and so we have to fall back upon excitement as a *pis-aller*. There is a mild excitement in making a man fancy himself desperately in love with you for a few weeks or months."

"Have you often done that?" Claud asked, in a somewhat tremulous voice.

"Three or four times," answered Nina coolly. "Dreadful, isn't it?"

"It is a rather cruel form of sport, I think."

"Not in the least, I assure you. Broken hearts are things of the past, if there ever were such things at all; and I haven't a doubt but that, if you could make a canvass of all the middle-aged gentlemen in the world, you would find forty-nine grateful rejected ones for one who thanked Heaven that he had been accepted."

"Well, say there was one in fifty capable of loving once and for always. What if you happened to meet with that one."

"Ah, if I did! But how should I know him? He wouldn't have himself labeled, I suppose. You see, the unfortunate part of it is that every one, as soons as he falls in love, thinks it is for the first and only time."

"You might test him in a thousand ways, as I dare say you know better than I do. And don't you think, Miss Flemyng—perhaps it is rather presumptuous in me to suggest it—but don't you think that it is just possible that, some day, while you were amusing yourself by playing with some one else's heart, you might chance to lose your own?"

"Oh yes; *tant va la cruche à l' eau*—there is that chance upon the cards; and it adds to the excitement. All the same, I can't fancy myself in the part of a love-lorn maiden. I like change and amusement and fine clothes—all the things that frivolous people like, in short: I am afraid I should never make a good *pendant* for the ideal young man. And yet—"

The last two monosyllables fell from the speaker's lips with a certain dreamy and caressing intonation. And indeed throughout this interview Miss Flemyng's voice had seemed to Claud's ear to belie in some measure the hardness of her words.

"I wish—" he began. But to what desire he was about to give utterance will never be known; for Nina arrested him suddenly by laying her hand on his arm.

"Hush!" she whispered. "Didn't you hear something?"

Claud listened. For a moment or two there was profound stillness. Then he fancied he could detect a faint rustling somewhere far away in the darkness. Then came distinctly a snapping, tearing sound; and he knew at once what was going on. "By Jove!" he exclaimed, "it is that fellow at the dahlias again."

"Oh, what fun!" cried Nina, starting to her feet. "Now we shall catch him. You go that way, and I will go this. He can't escape."

"No, no," whispered Claud; "you must not think of such a thing. How could you stop a man? Stay where you are, and keep quite quiet. I'll undertake to hold him; and if I call, you can alarm the house. But please on no account do anything until you hear me call. Will you promise me that?"

"All right," answered Nina, sitting down again. "Don't be longer than you can help, though."

A natural feminine tremor prompted her to add, as an afterthought, "And take care of yourself."

But Claud was already out of earshot, and so missed this last injunction. He stole noiselessly across the turf towards the famous dahlia-beds, taking care to keep between them and the bridge, so as to anticipate the chance of a dash for escape in that direction. The moat, which had lost all definiteness of outline on the side of the park, and sloped outwards in an irregular grassy bank, was still represented on the garden side by ancient brick-work, forming a clear drop of ten feet or more —an awkward place to run for at night, as Claud thought with inward satisfaction. He advanced on tip-toe till he could distinctly see a dark figure hastily pulling up and casting aside plant after plant, and then, saying aloud, "Now my man I think I have got you," sprang upon the delinquent.

Now Claud, having had the advantage of several minutes in

which to decide upon his tactics, knew very well what he was going to do. The enemy, surprised and taken in the rear, would probably surrender at discretion; but in order to make a certainty of the capture, it would be advisable to force his arms behind his back and pinion them; and with this end in view, our friend, having judged his handkerchief hardly stout enough for the purpose, had prudently slipped off his braces, and held them in readiness in his left hand. Unfortunately "the best laid schemes o' mice and men gang aft a-gley," as many a painstaking general has found out ere now, to his cost. Claud's first sensation, after pouncing upon the foe, was the violent jerking of his own legs from under him; immediately after which he found himself lying ignobly prone upon the sward, while the sound of a heavy body dropping into the moat, and the scrambling of footsteps upon the further side, brought home to him a dismal conviction of failure. Claud was up and across the park after the fugitive like a bird, thirst for vengeance being now added to a sense of public duty. The fellow had not got much of a start, after all, and from the thump, thump, thump of his flying feet upon the grass, it was evident that he was a heavily built man, wearing heavy boots, whom a good runner should have no difficulty in overtaking. Claud sped after the sound, wishing vainly that there were a moon—wishing still more that that unlucky idea of removing his braces had not occurred to him. An incident in M. About's *Roi des Montagnes*, wherein a similar mischance proves fatal, not to the pursuer, but to the pursued, flashed across his memory; and in truth a slim man running without braces is a heavily handicapped creature. Claud, however, without relaxing his speed, managed to effect a conjunction between button and buttonhole which does not appear to have suggested itself to M. Hermann Schultz; and, thus relieved, soon had the satisfaction of discovering that he was gaining upon the chase. The latter was plainly visible now, as was also the boundary of the park, consisting of a wire fence and a hedge. Through this the man crashed headlong; through it, a moment later, plunged Claud, only to find himself standing foolishly alone in the road, with neither sight nor sound to guide him farther.

"Hang it! he can't be far off," muttered Claud, peering to right and left; and sure enough, there, sitting quietly on a bank by the roadside, with his elbows on his knees, was a man, who neither stirred nor made any effort to escape on being approached. Claud drew nearer, and stooping down, looked into his face.

"I thought as much!" he exclaimed. "Upon my soul. Tom Burvill, you ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

"Good evening to you, sir," answered the other, bringing out his words with some difficulty in a series of gasps. "I ain't done nothing fur to be ashamed of, sir—not as I knows. I am a-setting here, sir—fur to enjoy the cool air—wot I often does of a night. Which the Queen's highway, sir—is free to all, I believe."

"Now, Tom, really this won't do, you know. It is bad enough to have destroyed Mr. Flemyng's dahlias and knocked me off my legs; but to pretend that I have not run you down and caught you fairly is a little too bad. Why, you are so pumped that you can hardly speak now."

"'Tis spavins of the heart, sir—which I have had them from a boy. I don't know nothing about no dahlias, sir."

"Well," said Claud, laughing, "if you can get the magistrates to believe that story, so much the better for you."

"Magistrates!" ejaculated the man in a tone of deep disgust. "Catch them believing of a honest man upon his oath! Why, that there blooming old Flemyng is one on 'em hisself, ain't he? Come now, Mr. Claud, you ain't never a-going to get a pore chap into trouble, arter all the sport we've had together, surely? Magistrits indeed! oh Lord!"

"I don't want to get you into trouble, Tom," answered Claud. "Indeed I rather had it in my mind to let you off for this once, though I certainly ought not to do anything of the kind. But you must make a clean breast of it first; and you must promise not to do this again. Of course I understand that revenge was at the bottom of it; I heard what happened to your father the other day. But you might have had the sense to see that Mr. Flemyng did no more than his duty; and anyhow it was rather a shabby bit of spite to go and tear up his flowers."

"Well, sir, if so be as his flowers have a-bin tore up, and if they've a-bin tore up by me—which I do not admit it, sir—wot I says is, sarve the old blackguard right!"

"Tom, I can't listen to this. Mr. Flemyng is a respectable and—er—benevolent gentleman, and a particular friend of my own, and if you wish to call him names, you must do so when I am not present."

"Well, sir, friends of yourn shall not be spoke against by me—leastways, not more'n is just and fair; for when you're called upon to name a cur, why, cur it must be, and 't'ain't no manner o' use fur to say grayhound nor foxhound. But seeing what you and yours has done for us, 'twould be a dirty thing for to go agin your wishes; and I humbly ask your pardon, sir, for laying of you on your back yonder—that is, if 'twere me as done it—but there's times when a man has to

think fust of his own safety, and can't help being a bit rough-like, and 'twas better fur me to take you orf yer legs than to knock you down, you see, sir—that is, if 'twere me as done it, which I do not admit nothink of the sort, sir."

"All right, Tom. You didn't hurt me, and I bear no malice."

"Thank you, sir, kindly; and as I were a-saying, your goodness, and wot Mr. Gervis done for us, I shall not forget it; nor yet father won't; and as for that there old Flemyng, seeing as he's a friend of yourn—and more's the pity, if you'll excuse o' me saying so, sir—why, he shan't be molested no more. That is, if 'twere me as—"

"Never mind the formula, Tom; we'll take that as understood. But what has my father ever done for you? I did not think he had even heard your name."

"Lord! ain't he told yer? Well, I don't know as I ought to speak; but there!—you won't let it go no further, sir. Why, 'twas t'other day, when father got into a bit of trouble about that there partridge—a old bird, sir, and a pore lean thing as couldn't have belonged to no one in partic'lar—little enough to make such a outcry over. You bin told the whole story, sir, I dessay. Well, father come out o' court feeling terrible down, thinking of wot mother and the children was to do, with times so bad and him in quod, when up comes Mr. Gervis quite quiet; and, 'Mr. Burvill,' he says, 'I dessay you ain't got no change in yer pocket; allow me,' he says—just like that—and outs with the money. Father, he were that flustered, wot with the surprise, and wot with his trouble, and having bin kep' so long with old Flemyng a-staring at him gorgeous-like from the bench"—(What stray echo of mythology could have suggested this adjective to Tom's imagination?)—"that he couldn't have spoke a word to save hisself, and let the gen'leman go without so much as a thank you. But when he come out arterwards he sees Mr. Gervis a-standing on the steps, and goes up for to say wot was right. 'That'll do,' says Mr. Gervis, rather short; 'I don't want no thanks. I come here to be amused,' he says, 'and I spent a werry pleasant arternoon,' he says; 'and werry pleased to pay for it,' he says. 'And lookee here,' he says; 'there ain't no call for you to talk about this, you understand.' 'As *you* please, sir,' says father. ''Tis betwigst you and me, sir, and though not spoke of shall not be forgot. And we'll drink your jolly good health, sir, to-night,' says father. Mr. Gervis, he looks at father curious-like. 'You're a disrepitable old person, Mr. Burvill,' he says. 'I suspect you'll be hung if you live long enough. But go on drinking your friends' healths, and maybe you'll cheat the gallus yet,' says he. Them was his words. 'Go on drinking your friends

healths, and maybe you'll cheat the gallus yet.' Haw, haw, haw! You should hear father tell it. 'Tis enough to make you bust yourself laughing."

Claud felt that he could listen to the witticism which had so greatly tickled the Burvills, father and son, without much fear of being overtaken by such a catastrophe as Tom suggested; but he laughed nevertheless, partly out of complaisance, and partly because the story had been a very pleasant one to him. "How like the governor!" he thought. "He is always helping lame dogs over stiles, only he gets no credit for it, because he doesn't care to blow his own trumpet. I shall tell Gen about this." Then Tom—always protecting himself by an occasional reiteration of his saving-clause—went on to relate how a burning desire to "be even with that there old Flemyng" had led him into wreaking vengeance upon the unoffending dahlias, expressed some qualified contrition for his misdeeds, and in consideration of being allowed to evade the just consequences of them, bound himself to refrain from such lawless acts for the future. It is painful to be obliged to add that this evil-doer was finally furnished with the wherewithal to drink his captor's health.

And so these two prepared to part upon terms of mutual good-will. But before he said good night, Tom deemed it incumbent upon him to deliver himself of a well-meant caution.

"Begging your pardon, sir," he said, "I hope there ain't nothing betwigst you and the young lady there."

"Don't be impertinent, Tom," said Claud, good-humoredly enough.

"I will not, sir. But take my word for it, sir, them Flemyngs is no good. We fishermen knows more'n you think, sir, and as for that there Miss Nina, she's a owdacious one, and no mistake about it. She's too fond of gen'lemen at large to stick long to one, married or unmarried, is that young 'oman. I seen her with 'em times an' again. One day 'tis this one, next day 'tis that. Last year 'twas Sir Frederick; now 'tis you, sir, axin' your pardon. Means no offense, sir; but I thought 'twas only right to put you on your guard like."

Claud of course rebuked his over-zealous counselor; but for all that, the rough warning, coupled with the remembrance of Nina's own confessions, had the effect of somewhat lowering his spirits, and it was in a pensive mood that he walked back towards the house to announce his failure to arrest the thief.

Nina, tired of waiting outside in the dark, had returned to the library, where Claud found her sitting with her father. It thus became necessary that some account of the evening's ad-

such a great friend of the Gervises', about the suitability of the match, about her own maternal anxieties, and her strong impression that her son was "*really* in earnest" this time.

"Oh, well, if you ask me what I think," said Mrs. Knowles, whose opinion, by the way, had not been asked at all as yet, "I tell you that I think such a match anything but suitable. I won't say that the girl is too good for him; because I have always had a liking for your young scapegrace, as you know; but her standard is too high for him; and it is more than likely that, if they married now, he would break her heart before long. That's nothing to you, you'll say: so long as he gets a lady-like wife, who will behave herself properly and leave her neighbors' husbands alone, you care very little whether her heart be whole or broken. But I care a good deal as it happens; and that is why I am not sorry that there is a fair prospect of a disappointment in store for you."

"Oh, *do* you think so?" Lady Croft was almost in tears. To be accused of being an accomplice in the prospective breaking of Geneviève's heart did not distress her much, recklessness in the matter of accusation being her old friend's prerogative; but that so shrewd an observer should throw doubts upon what everybody else had seemed to regard as next door to a certainty was a heavy blow. "I had hoped so much that he was in earnest," she sighed.

"There are two or more parties to every bargain," Mrs. Knowles remarked dryly.

"You surely cannot mean that she is trifling with him! Oh, that would be too—*horrid* of her! Mrs. Knowles, I *implore* you to conceal nothing from me. If I have been mistaken and misinformed, I would far rather be undeceived at once."

"I tell you I don't know anything at all about it. How is an old woman to fathom the deep ways of girls and boys who are always on their best behavior before her? If I were in your place, and if I hadn't patience and common sense enough to stand aside and avoid meddling where I could do no good, I should go straight to head-quarters for the information I wanted. But, mind you, I don't advise your doing anything of the sort."

Never a word that falls from the lips of man or woman—so they say—but has its results, great or small, immediate or remote. To these guarded utterances on the part of Mrs. Knowles, for instance, was due the occurrence of a phenomenon unprecedented in the annals of Lynshire: the appearance, namely, of Lady Croft's dark-green barouche upon the Lynchester race-course.

I hardly know why it is that the Lynchester autumn meeting

has never met with much support at the hands of the local magnates. It is a decent, orderly meeting enough, attended by but few roughs and very few bookmakers; the horses belong for the most part to Lynshire owners, and six to four on the favorite is the usual state of the betting before each race. There is, therefore, little temptation or opportunity for the risking of fortunes on Higham Down; nor does there appear, upon the face of it, to be any reason why the ladies of the county should not grace the proceedings by their presence. But, whether it was owing to a vague impression of incongruity between the sound of cathedral-bells and the yells of betting-men, or to the influence of Lord Courtney, who has ever set his face against any commingling of the upper and middle classes, certain it is that a decree went forth long ago to the effect that it should not be "the thing" to be seen at Lynchester races; and as, in our part of the world, we do not violate established custom without some grave cause, the nobility and gentry of the neighborhood, when they show themselves upon the course, usually leave their wives and daughters behind them.

It is true that there exist among us, as elsewhere, a few independent spirits who will not be bound by laws to which their reason refuses its assent. Miss Croft, for one, is always to be seen in a conspicuous place near the winning-post, and Nina Flemyng has upon more than one occasion been persuaded to bear her company, while there is generally a sprinkling of fair strangers ignorant of the unwritten laws of Lynshire. The Gervis family had hardly yet emerged from the latter category in the particular month of September with which we are now concerned, and consequently felt no hesitation in accepting Freddy Croft's offer to drive them over to Higham Down on his drag.

"We'll make up a regular jolly party," said that well-meaning young man confidentially to Mr. Gervis. "Miss Gervis will have the box-seat, of course—that is, if she will do me the honor to sit beside me; and Nina and my sister and Claud, you know, and a chap I've got staying with me, a real good sort, and the best hand at a coach-horn in Europe—that'll make six; and then there'll be old Flemyng for *you*; and Miss Potts—do you think Miss Potts would come? If she would, I might try and get Colonel Finch to talk to her—talk to anybody, old Finch would. I should say that would be about enough. One doesn't want a crowd of outsiders, does one?"

"Certainly not," agreed Mr. Gervis gravely. "Your arrangements are perfect, and it is most thoughtful of you to have provided each of us with a suitable companion. Probably

however, you will have to eliminate Potts and partner. I can't answer for the effect that your seductive inducements may have upon her; but I doubt whether her sense of decorum will permit of her scrambling up on to the roof of a coach."

And in truth Miss Potts, on being informed of the proposed expedition, gratefully but firmly declined to join in it, excusing herself upon the plea of uncertain nerves and an invincible terror of sitting behind four horses, however skillfully driven. But the remainder of the party was made up without any occasion for entreaties, and it is to be hoped that the several couples so judiciously selected enjoyed themselves, each after their own fashion, during the long drive.

The occupant of the box-seat was assuredly not the least contented of the coach-load. Often, in other and less joyous days, Geneviève looked back upon that excursion to Lynchester races as one of the brightest episodes of a time in which all things had been bright. The exhilarating influences attendant upon coaching are so widely known and appreciated in these days that it is needless to insist upon the natural excitement of one who found herself for the first time under their spell; but as charm of landscape has a good deal to say to the true enjoyment of all out-door pursuits—as fishermen cast their flies with an additional zest under the shadow of the wild mountains of Norway or in solemn Canadian solitudes—as the sportsman rejoices in the purple moorland and the flying lights and shades upon the distant hills—so the delight of sitting behind four well-broken horses may be greatly enhanced if pleasant scenery lie on either side of the way; and Geneviève confidently avers to this present day that the fourteen miles of high-road which separate Southlands from Lynchester are without their equals in England for beauty and variety of the cheerful, rural order.

The heavy drag rolled on swiftly, up hill and down dale, now thundering through a straggling village, where children ran out, with their fingers in their mouths, to stare at the quality, while their mothers courtesied from the door-ways; now skirting woods upon which autumn had already laid touches of yellow, russet and brown; sometimes crossing a gorse-covered common, or "minnis," as we should say in our parts, whence the towers of Lynchester cathedral could be distinguished far below in the one direction and white sails against the horizon-line in the other; sometimes descending again into a deep hollow, where there would be pretty sure to be sand-pits and flights of little martins darting hither and thither about their rocky nests. All the land had that aspect of drowsy well-being which is the property of England and autumn; the gray old churches,

clothed in ivy and flanked by yew-trees, and the thatched farm-buildings among their stacks, seemed sleeping in mellow sunlight, as if such were their normal condition, and they knew nothing of the bleak winter gales. But there was no lack of life, human and other, about. Wagons, laden with the riches of an abundant harvest, drew up to let Sir Frederick go by; farmers, taking their good ladies in gigs to see the horse-racing, touched their hats, and were saluted in return by the prescribed lifting of the driver's elbow; every now and again a covey of partridges whirred up out of the turnips; and once, from the edge of a marsh, a snipe rose suddenly—whizz, whizz! right and left, and then away like an arrow.

It is in truth a pleasant, homely country, and not by me, who know and love every acre of it, shall its merits be disparaged; but I can't but suspect that, if Geneviève's way had lain across Essex flats or through the infernal regions of the black country, she would have conceived a speedy admiration for those dreary landscapes. For the axiom we started with is, after all, a two-edged one, and if Nature flatters happiness, happiness I suppose is not slow to return the compliment, and will have it that all nature must be beautiful. And Geneviève was at this time happier than she had ever been before in her life. It is needless to add that she was unaware of any special reason for her being so, or, for that matter, of her being so at all; for when reflections such as these begin to thrust themselves forward the subject of them is apt to vanish mighty quickly. It was enough for Geneviève, on that sunny autumn morning, to feel that life was sweet, and that somebody close at hand cared for her more than conventionality allowed him to say. She did not tell herself that Freddy was in love with her—I fancy that some women shrink from putting such thoughts into so many words, even long after the truth has become clear to them—but how could she help noticing the deferential tone which he always adopted in addressing her? Or could she fail to observe what pains he took to gratify every whim of hers, and how he remembered careless words and hints that had fallen from her weeks before? The key-note of the girl's character was an intense and almost morbid desire to be loved; and I am not prepared to say that any skillful man would have had much difficulty in making himself loved by her. Freddy was not exactly skillful; but he was certainly dangerous. He was kind and merry and had quick sympathies, and when his frank blue eyes met Geneviève's, she felt that she was looking into the face of an honest man, who would not know how to tell a lie, and who would stick to his friends through good report and evil report. And perhaps, in the main, she read him rightly.

Freddy's tongue, always an active member, had little rest between Southlands and the race-course. He gave his neighbor some elementary instruction in the art of driving four-in-hand; he told her the names and pedigrees of his horses; he pointed out where the houses of his various acquaintances stood, and had some queer anecdote to relate or terse description to give of each and all of their owners; and Geneviève listened, speaking seldom herself, laughing sometimes, and quietly enjoying it all. Behind her, Miss Croft and her attendant swain were entertaining one another uproariously; Claud and Nina were, as usual, conversing in soft undertones; and from time to time, dominating all other sounds, came fragments of didactic utterances—"The scientific basis of morality must be sought for in the evolution of conduct. . . . . A right understanding of the relation of causes to effects renders all revealed religion superfluous. . . . . Sin will cease when man shall have discovered that sin is essentially fatal to happiness," etc., etc.—showing that Mr. Flemyng had been fuddling his brains with a superficial study of Mr. Herbert Spencer.

The course was reached only too soon. Freddy steered his coach very neatly through the crowd of vehicles which were already gathered together upon the turf, and drew up in the place which had been reserved for him.

"I say, I'm not going to sit here all day, you know," Miss Croft announced immediately. "Come along, Nina, and let's have a look at them in the paddock. I'll tell you what to back as soon as I've seen them. Now then; catch me, somebody; I'm going overboard!"

And with a scramble and jump, Miss Croft reached the ground. Nina followed her in a more leisurely and graceful fashion; and then Freddy said—

"We might as well go too, mightn't we, Miss Gervis? There's a good half hour to be got through before the next race, and we can take a walk round without being hustled, or anything. We ain't an over showy lot to look at down here; but our manners are quite up to the mark, I promise you."

Geneviève nodded assent. Like the proverbial British soldier, she was ready to go anywhere and do anything—ready, also, to be pleased with everything. Into the paddock she did not go, Freddy being unwilling to let her approach so closely to the horses' heels—though, to be sure, he had seen his sister and Miss Flemyng adventure themselves into that dangerous proximity without a tremor—but she was taken to look at the man who swallowed blazing tow and broke stones on his head, at the country-people solemnly revolving in a merry-go-round to the strains of a wheezy barrel-organ, at the knock-

'em downs and the shooting-galleries and the other common accompaniments of English racing; and with all these remarkable sights she was pleased to declare herself much entertained. Even Higham Down came in for a share of her praise; and, indeed, with its crowd of gayly dressed holiday-makers, its brass bands and tents and fluttering flags, and its far-stretching prospect of autumn woods, fields, and blue distances, that ordinarily bleak district seemed to have assumed a smile to welcome the stranger. And then the racing itself. Longchamps could show nothing more attractive, Geneviève thought. There, as here, there were weedy-looking horses, tiny jockeys in silk jackets, false starts, exciting finishes; and if the quality of the sport were a trifle inferior in the present case, the enjoyment of the uninitiated was certainly not affected thereby.

After a time hampers were unpacked, pies and mayonnaises and other good things made their appearance upon the roof of the drag, corks were drawn, conversation grew louder and laughter more hearty, and soon everybody began to show an inclination to view the world in as rosy a light as did Geneviève herself. Mr. Flemyng, in particular, rising to the level of the occasion under the influence of sunshine and champagne, delivered himself of an eloquent panegyric upon the English thoroughbred, tracing the pedigree of that noble animal up to his Arab ancestors, dwelling in glowing language upon his speed, courage, and endurance, and committing himself to such extraordinary statements with reference to the process of his training that the three younger men of the party had much ado to repress an unseemly outburst of mirth. The yokels who slouched by, with their hands in their pockets, stared up open-mouthed at the flushed and gray-haired orator overhead; Nina looked a little uneasy, Miss Croft contemptuous, while Mr. Gervis, with his head on one side, appeared to be calculating how much longer his venerable friend would be allowed to shout without the intervention of the police. But Mr. Flemyng neither saw nor heeded any of these things. Toasts, he said, were, he was aware, somewhat out of date; but on an occasion like the present, when they were surrounded, as it were, by the patrons of the turf, when they saw about them evidences of the interest taken in their own country in that—er—er—grand institution, and when they were partaking of the hospitality—he would say the generous hospitality—of—er—er—in short, of a patron of the turf, he could not refrain from proposing one toast, which he was sure would be received with the enthusiasm which it merited. He meant, "Success to horse-racing."

It was at this convivial moment that Freddy startled every-

body by dropping his glass and exclaiming in a loud voice, "Good Lord, deliver us!"

"What *is* the matter?" asked Nina, who had been put a little out of humor by her father's exhibition, and who hated being startled.

"Oh, nothing," answered Freddy; "only the world has come to an end, I expect, and my mother has driven over to announce it. Oh, there's no doubt about it; it's my mother, fast enough; and I give you my word I should as soon have thought of seeing the Archbishop of Canterbury at Lynchester races."

Lady Croft, making her way, attended by a bewildered footman, through the crowd that surrounded her son's drag, was probably as conscious of being out of her proper place as any one could have wished her to be; but it is notorious that the timidest things in creation will grow bold when under the sway of maternal instinct; and this fond mother happened, as we have seen, to be harassed by anxieties which it would have taken something more formidable than the jostling of tag, rag and bobtail to keep her from seizing the first favorable occasion of allaying.

"I have come to carry you away," she said, smiling up at Geneviève, after she had bowed graciously to each member of the little party on the top of the drag. "You were saying, the other day, that you would like so much to hear the cathedral service; and as I had to drive into Lynchester this afternoon, and knew you were here, I thought it would be such a good opportunity—especially as it seems that they are going to have a *particularly* lovely anthem. You, know, it is Saint —Saint—well, Saint *Somebody's* day. We shall be just in time, if we start at once; and the Dean has very kindly promised to have stalls kept for us."

"But Lord bless my soul, mother!" exclaimed Freddy, aghast, "Miss Gervis is out for a day's racing; she don't want to go to church."

"My *dear* boy, *don't* you think Miss Gervis may have had enough of this dreadful noise and bustle? You forget that her tastes are not *quite* the same as yours. Now, Miss Gervis, would you not a great deal rather listen to some beautiful music for half an hour than stay where you are? I am quite *sure* you would."

Geneviève, perhaps, was not equally positive; but what could she do?

"It is very kind of you to have taken so much trouble," she said, preparing to descend from her high position, without directly answering the question.

"Not at all—only too *delighted!*" returned Lady Croft,

triumphing. And then, thinking that a word of consolation might properly be thrown to Freddy—"I shall bring her back long before it is time for you to start," she added encouragingly; and so departed, bearing off the prize.

Geneviève, accustomed all her life long to submit to the caprices of others, allowed herself to be driven away in Lady Croft's carriage without a murmur. She could not, however, help regretting her curtailed holiday a little; nor did the cathedral music prove to be by any means worthy of the sacrifice which she had made for the sake of it. That saint whose name Lady Croft had failed to remember must, if he had any existence at all, have been only a black-letter worthy; for there was neither opening nor concluding voluntary, as there would have been, had the day been a festival of the Church, and the minor canon who gabbled through the service, like a clerk reciting a legal document, appeared to be in one mind with the choir as to the desirability of getting the business over as soon as might be.

There was but a scanty congregation present, consisting for the most part of old ladies—wives, probably, of the cathedral dignitaries—who occupied stalls here and there, and repeated the responses in their quavering voices. From a great wheel-window in the south transept long rays of blue and crimson and golden sunlight streamed down upon clustered pillars and carved oak, upon marble flags and ancient brasses, upon the old ladies' bonnets, and the white surplices of the choristers, and the vergers in their stuff gowns, and the bald head of Mr. Dean, who was well stricken in years and had dropped asleep on his knees They seemed to fall like a benediction from Heaven, Geneviève fancied—those rainbow tints which had shed their soft brilliance upon so many generations of dead and forgotten worshipers, and which would illumine the children's children of those who now claimed a brief right to kneel in Lynchester cathedral. Those old canons and their wives must have an easy, happy time of it, she thought—a peaceful evening of life, dwelling in their dim, spacious houses under the shadow of the cathedral towers, toddling in to the daily services, waiting quietly for the end in an atmosphere of solemnity and beauty and rest. Surely the vulgar cares and worries of this world could never penetrate into those cloistered recesses or obtrude themselves upon the dignified repose of those trim lawns and walled gardens. And then she began to wonder what it would be like to be quite, quite old, and whether, supposing she had reached a patriarchal age, she would like to be the wife of a pillar of the Church. From which point she allowed her mind to wander

off into a variety of vague speculations, instead of saying her prayers, as she ought to have been doing.

Lady Croft was more devout. She remained kneeling for some time after the little procession of clergy and lay-clerks had passed, with echoing footsteps, down the nave; and who knows whether, if Geneviève could have overheard her neighbor's petitions, she might not have been startled by the sound of her own name occurring in them? For Lady Croft, good soul, had kept unimpaired the religious beliefs which she had learnt as a child, and now, in her old age, asked quite simply for what she wanted, just as, fifty odd years before, she had prayed for fine weather, or a new doll, or what not. The special intervention of Providence seemed requisite to the attainment of the end which, at that moment, she had chiefly in view; but something might certainly be accomplished by human effort, and she was determined that she would at all events discover within the next quarter of an hour whether there were any ground for the disquieting hints thrown out by Mrs. Knowles.

The dean in his surplice joined the two ladies as soon as they had emerged into the cloisters, and suggested tea at the deanery and a subsequent examination of the cathedral and its ancient monuments; but Lady Croft declined both offers with many thanks. The carriage was waiting, she said, and her young friend had an appointment out in the country to keep presently. (She did not think it necessary to mention that the appointment was at Higham Down.) They would only just take a turn round the cloisters before starting. Some other day she hoped to have the pleasure of calling upon Mrs. —Mrs.— The old gentleman said his wife would always be delighted to see Lady Croft, and soon took his leave—not unwillingly perhaps.

The time was getting short, and Lady Croft could not afford to waste any more of it. She made Geneviève sit down beside her on a stone bench, in front of which was a grass-plot, shut in by broken arches and ivy-grown ruins, and opened the attack.

"I am so *glad* I thought of bringing you here this afternoon," she began. "The music was not *quite* as good as usual, and I suppose they must have changed the anthem for some reason or other; still, it was worth while coming, was it not?—and *so* much nicer than spending the whole day on that horrid race-course. And it has been such a pleasure to me to meet you again. I was in hopes that I should have seen you, the other day, when I called; but you were out."

Geneviève said she had been very sorry.

"Oh, so was I. I was *dreadfully* disappointed. I very seldom care to make new acquaintances now; but *you*, of course,

are such an acquisition to the neighborhood; and if I had not been away from home, I should have hoped to see a great deal of you all," said Lady Croft, very graciously. "I have *heard* of you, though, constantly from my son," she continued, "and of all your kindness to him. You don't know what a relief it is to my mind to think that he has friends like you within reach. Poor boy! I cannot help feeling anxious about him sometimes. He is so warm-hearted and unsuspecting; and staying in all kinds of houses, as he does, there are constant risks for him which *I* see, though he cannot. The girls of the present day seem to me to be a different race from what we were. We used to consider the name of a flirt a reproach; they, I believe, absolutely glory in it. I hope, my dear child, that *you* never flirt."

Lady Croft turned her head round, and looked inquiringly into her hearer's face, as she delivered this shot; but if she expected to see an ingenuous blush there, she was disappointed. The daughter of Vincent Gervis and the Marchesa Santinetti had inherited a constitution free from such distressing tendencies, and would not have been put out of countenance even if her ladyship's thrust had struck home.

"Oh no," she answered, laughing a little. "But you were speaking about your son."

"Yes. I am afraid for him. He is as true as steel himself; he does not understand what is called flirtation" (Oh, Lady Croft!) "and there are many girls, unfortunately, who take a delight in making men fond of them, while they themselves are thinking of nothing but their own amusement. I think that is so unwomanly and *wrong*, don't you?"

"Do you mean Miss Lambert?" Geneviève asked.

"That horrid *common* girl? Oh *dear* no! there never was the least danger there. Freddy would not have *thought* of such a thing; his taste is too good for that. No; what I mean is that there are others—persons of his position, you understand—who give me the idea of being nice and suitable, and who are ready to encourage him, without perhaps seriously reflecting upon what they are doing."

"So that the wrong people want to marry him, and the right people don't. That is very unlucky," said Geneviève gravely.

This was not exactly the impression which Lady Croft had intended to convey. She shifted her ground a little.

"There are so very few right people at all," she sighed; "that is the worst of it. And if you knew my son as well as I do, you would see how absolutely *essential* it is that he should marry some one who would be really the right person for him."

"Some one of a cheerful disposition?" suggested Geneviève, for want of any better remark.

Lady Croft demurred. "Well, not so much that. Of course he would not like his wife to be dull or moping."

"I don't think she would have the chance," observed Geneviève, smiling.

"No; perhaps not. But that was not what I had in my mind. The truth is that Freddy will be what his wife may choose, or be able, to make him. Some men are like that, you know: the Crofts have always been so; it is in the blood. And so many of them have gone wrong, and are spoken of now as having been bad men, when in reality they were not that at all, but only thoughtless and high-spirited; and the fault has been with the women of their family, who have been timid, or selfish, or somehow unable to influence them. I often think that, when the time comes for us all to give an account of our lives, we shall find that we are answerable for many sins of others which we might have prevented, if we had used our opportunities rightly."

Lady Croft paused. She had spoken the last few words in a quiet voice, without any of her usual exaggerated emphasis, and there were tears in her eyes when she ceased. If half of what one has heard about the late Sir Montagu be true, it is very unlikely that any female influence could have perceptibly retarded his progress to the deuce; but then what one hears of one's neighbors very seldom is true; and doubtless this poor, weak, well-intentioned lady had a store of faded old memories in the light of which her husband would appear, not as a tipsy bully, but as a gallant young suitor protesting life-long fidelity to the object of his vows. I have been told that theirs was a love-match, and that, when they came home after the wedding, they were admitted on all hands to be the handsomest couple in the county.

"And so," resumed the widow presently, "you see it is not everybody whom I should care to welcome as Freddy's wife. I know quite well what the girl whom he ought to marry should be like. She should be quiet and cultivated in her tastes; she should be fond of music, because that is a passion of his; she should be ready to sympathize in his amusements, without actually joining in all of them; for, if she did, she might lower herself in his esteem. If possible, she should always hold herself the least bit in the world above him; and a certain amount of decision she *must* have. Such a wife as that would make him happy all his life long; and I *know* that he would make her happy too."

How could Geneviève help recognizing the person intended to be portrayed in this distinct sketch? The inference was flattering, but embarrassing, and it was difficult to see what

answer could be made, or was expected to be made, to such general observations. And then on a sudden, as she sat silent there, poking the point of her parasol between the chinks of the flagged pavement, she found herself being warmly embraced.

After that, Lady Croft had the grace and the sense not to say any more. On the way back to the race-course she discoursed with much vivacity upon various topics, but did not again allude to her son's destinies. She was at ease in her mind, feeling that the object of her excursion had been attained, and that it now only remained for Freddy to make the needful avowal of his love. And yet Geneviève had neither said nor done anything to warrant so hasty a leap to conclusions, except that she had allowed herself to be kissed—which, to be sure, she could hardly have helped.

Freddy had a somewhat silent and absent neighbor on the box-seat, as he drove homewards. This, however, did not so much signify, as he himself had a great deal to relate and talk about; and while seven tongues were keeping up an incessant accompaniment to the clatter of the horses' hoofs and the rumbling of the wheels, the inactivity of the eighth was fortunate enough to escape notice. Mr. Flemyng, who had been assuaging his thirst with more champagne during the afternoon, had harked back to the subject of his morning's discourse, and was laying down an authoritative scheme of ethics, in the course of which sundry hard words, such as transcendentalism, pseudo-materialism and the like, lost a syllable here and there.

"No such thing as crime!" cried he, with a wave of his hand, apropos of the county jail, which somebody pointed out in the distance. "No such thing as crime! Mis-directed energy—merely misd'rect' energy!"

To one listener this indistinct philosophic utterance sounded almost like an echo of the theory which she had just heard broached with reference to the Croft family, whose energies, it appeared, had taken a wrong direction for the want of a guiding hand at once gentle and firm. Was it her mission to supply this deficiency in the case of the present head of the house? Had she it in her power to do so? And was good-humored, unromantic little Freddy indeed the man to whom she could consecrate her love and her life, and, forsaking all other, hold herself till death should them part?

These questions, and sundry others, our heroine may have debated, as the twilight deepened and the woods grew dim, and the hedgerows and houses flitted past her half-conscious eyes. But she probably perceived that, if she could answer the last of them in the affirmative, the remainder might be allowed to take their chance.

CHAPTER XVI.

FRIENDLY WARNINGS.

I HAVE not at any time been tempted to invest a portion of my limited capital in unlimited concerns; but I can well imagine that, if I had done so, and that if my choice had fallen, say, upon the Glasgow Bank—as, of course, it would have done; for nobody ever had such luck as I have—I can well imagine, I say, that when the fatal hour struck, and the papers brought me the announcement of my ruin, I should not have been acquainted with all its details for more than an hour or so before at least half a dozen kind friends would have hastened in, with the *Times* in their hands, to break the news to me. The world is full of such well-meaning folks—people who will insist upon reading out to you from the *Illustrated London News* the provisions of your late uncle's will, in which, unhappily, your name does not figure; or who, after you have been holding wet blankets in front of your fireplace for half an hour and have collected your valuables and dispatched a messenger in hot haste for the parish engine, will send round a footman with Mr. Brown's compliments, and is Mr. Jones aware that his chimbley is afire? I am even acquainted with certain persons who will not suffer one of my periodical liver-attacks to pass without letting me know, in commiserating accents, that I am looking far from well; which surely is much as though they should tell me that I have a nose upon my face.

It was, therefore, only to be expected that, with two love affairs going on under his very eyes, Mr. Gervis should have had no lack of informants who felt it right to warn him of the turn matters were taking. Not to mention a succession of agitated missives bearing the Trouville post-mark, which, in accordance with his unvarying custom, he left unanswered, he was favored from all sides with verbal communications the purport of which was that the future both of his son and his daughter was in danger of becoming compromised, that Freddy Croft was a libertine, and Nina Flemyng, to say the least of it, a flirt. Admiral Bagshawe, meeting the owner of Southlands at the club, took occasion to speak a few neighborly words to this effect in his blunt, straightforward way; Miss Pennefather, sustained by a sense of duty, overcame her maiden modesty so far as to recount some episodes in the domestic history of Croft Manor and the Moated House; Mrs. This, Mrs. That, and Lady T'other followed suit; and, one fine after-

noon, who should come driving up in a mail-phaeton, bent upon the same charitable errand, but the lord-lieutenant of the county *in propriâ personâ?*

Mr. Gervis happened to be sauntering alone among his garden walks when this portent became visible; and Lord Courtney, catching sight of him, pulled up, and handed the reins to his groom.

"How are you, Gervis? how are you?" said he, as he descended slowly to the ground.

There was a time when Lord Courtney was a great dandy, and wore the smallest patent-leather boots that ever were seen; but the gout has long since forced him to discard these vanities, just as years have robbed him of his formerly slim figure. He is still, however, a carefully dressed man. On the present occasion he wore a gray frock-coat and trousers, and had a pale yellow rose in his buttonhole. His tall white hat was, as usual, tilted slightly forwards, so that he had to throw back his head and lower his eyelids in order to see any object in front of him—a detail which was not without influence upon the majesty of his carriage.

"Taking your afternoon stroll?" he asked affably. "If you will allow me, I will join you. Charming place you have here, Gervis—charming upon my word!"

Mr. Gervis said it was pretty, no doubt; but it was getting horribly damp and cold in the mornings and evenings.

"Ah, well, yes—I dare say. You must expect heavy dews at this season of the year. But your position is good. I wish my house stood as well. And how do you like Lynshire? Find it a little dull perhaps? Yes; a man accustomed to society, like yourself, naturally would. But, as counties go, it is well enough—sociable, you know; and the properties don't change hands much; which is the great thing. Lady Courtney would have done herself the pleasure of calling upon the Princess Ouranoff; but she is a sad invalid, as you know; and it is rather a long drive from us to you. Somebody told me, too, that the Princess and your daughter were only to be in England for another week or so."

"The Princess has been at Trouville these two months," answered Mr. Gervis; "my daughter is still with me."

"Ah, yes; so I have understood. And I must congratulate you upon being the father of so attractive a young lady as everybody declares her to be. Some day I shall hope to have the honor of being presented to her."

I believe that at court, where he has more than once held high offices, Lord Courtney has the reputation of being a man of singularly distinguished and agreeable manners. It is certain

that he can make himself very pleasant when he chooses—which, to be sure, is not every day—and he was pleased to do so now. Suiting his conversation, as he thought, to his company, he soon quitted local subjects for the wider field of European politics, with regard to which he represented himself as occupying the position of a well-informed spectator. His manner implied that he looked upon Gervis as being in some sort *du métier*, and he concealed from him neither the contents of a letter which he had received from the Prime Minister only the day before, nor the French ambassador's significant remark, as he stepped on board the steamer at Dover, on his way to take a month's leave of absence, nor certain rumors which had lately been wafted over from Berlin. As to the secret understanding of two celebrated Chancellors he felt bound to maintain a discreet reserve; but he allowed sundry hints to escape from him which, if rightly taken, might well serve as a basis for prophecy of coming events; and if in truth he knew very little more of these matters than you or I, and if he altogether failed to impose upon the veteran diplomatist who listened to him so deferentially, his intentions were none the less excellent for that.

Not until he had paced up and down the gravel walks for the best part of an hour, and, after consulting his watch, had declared that he must really be going, did he touch upon the genuine object of his visit; and this he introduced airily, as a sort of afterthought. By the way, Lady Courtney had mentioned to him some foolish gossip which he sincerely hoped had no substratum of truth in it. And then he proceeded to repeat what was being commonly said in the county.

"I make it a rule never to interfere in the affairs of my neighbors: in fact I do not—ah—care to do so, as a general thing," concluded Lord Courtney, seeming to imply that the affairs of his neighbors were really a great deal too far beneath him to merit notice.

"With all the cares of your lord-lieutenancy upon your shoulders, you cannot be expected to find time for that amiable occupation," remarked Mr. Gervis.

"Well, no. But something is due to an old friend; and I have thought it well to—ah—put you upon your guard."

"I cannot sufficiently express my thanks."

"Not at all! I beg you won't mention it. I shall be only too glad if a few words from me should prove of service to you; and bystanders, you know, proverbially see most of the game. With regard to these—ah—Flemyngs, I cannot say much. I am not personally acquainted with them; but I have told you what people say of the girl, and in any case, I presume that

you would hardly wish your boy to be entrapped into a hasty marriage at his age. Young Croft I do know; and I am sorry to have to add that I have the worst possible opinion of him. I should not envy the lot of any lady who should be condemned to live in such a—a—what shall I say?—such a den of wild beasts as Croft Manor. It occurred to me that, having been as long absent from England as you have, you might be under some misapprehension as to his status in the county—that you might imagine him a man of position, or likely to become so. I can assure you that he has not the slightest chance of ever being anything of the kind. He has of course certain advantages of birth and fortune; but he has not chosen to use them, and they are not conspicuous enough to entitle him of themselves to a place in society. He is an impudent young dog, with a taste for low company now, and he will probably proceed, through the usual stages to become a ruined drunkard, as his father was before him. Were I in your place I should forbid him my house before the mischief reached a head. Well, good-by, Gervis: glad to have seen you. I need not say that I do not wish what I have mentioned to you to go any further."

"I fully understand and respect your feelings," replied Gervis. "The responsibilities of a father are very heavy, and if one were not cheered occasionally by some such proofs of disinterested friendship as you have shown me this afternoon, I hardly know how one could bear up under them. My compliments to Lady Courtney, and many thanks for your valuable hints. Good-by. Go away, you unspeakable booby, and for the love of Heaven don't come back again: you are the least amusing of all the blockheads I have encountered hereabouts."

The concluding words, it is needless to say, were uttered after Lord Courtney had climbed into his mail-phaeton again, and it is to be hoped that that benevolent nobleman drove away under the impression that his unselfishness in discharging an irksome duty had been properly appreciated.

"A friend, or rather an enemy of yours, Lord Courtney, was here to-day," Mr. Gervis remarked casually to Freddy Croft that same evening. "How have you managed to offend him so deeply?"

"I suppose it must be that ducking he got with the fire-hose," said Freddy pensively. "I told Lynchester at the time that he wouldn't like it. He has hated me like poison ever since, and I'm sorry for it, because he's a good sort of old boy, in spite of his pomposity, and he subscribes handsomely to the hounds, though he don't often come out himself. Poor old Courtney! He isn't a bad-hearted old chap, you know."

"He said you were an impudent young dog, with a taste for low company."

"Did he really?"

"He really did. And the worst of it is that it's true," said Gervis, who had from the first had a sneaking fondness for his good-humored little neighbor, and was in the habit of addressing him in a tone of familiarity wholly unknown to many of his older friends.

"Well, I don't know what you call low company," returned Freddy. "I'm more at Southlands than anywhere else, at all events."

Whereat Mr. Gervis gave a short laugh, and rang the bell for another bottle of the claret which his guest especially affected. Freddy's private opinion was that, when the time should come for him to solicit that embarrassing interview which all men, save such as have the luck to espouse orphans, must face sooner or later, he would be met in no very austere spirit by his future father-in-law.

Such was, indeed, the almost unanimous conviction of those who felt an interest in the fortunes of Freddy and Geneviève. Miss Potts alone, in a silent minority of one, thought differently. Her mental attitude with regard to her employer was one of unalterable distrust, and she knew that he was never more dangerous than when he was outwardly most complaisant. One other feature of his character, which in any one else might have taken rank as a virtue, but in him could only be counted as a far-seeing sense of expediency, she had observed: namely, that he was in all things a man of his word. If, as Varinka vehemently asserted, he had bound himself to allow his daughter to enter into no matrimonial engagement during her stay in England, then the sooner Sir Frederick knew the worst the better, for his fate was sealed. Miss Potts, therefore, was ill at ease, and would have given the half of that snug little sum which years of economy had enabled her to lay by, if by so doing she could have averted the impending sword from her dear pupil's head. *Non Siculæ dapes, non atrium citharæve cantus*—not those frequent dinners, at which Mr. Flemyng enjoyed himself so hugely and the laughter of the young folks was so loud; not the plaintive thrilling of the violin on soft autumn evenings, could lull Miss Potts's fears to rest, or raise her drooping spirits. Sometimes she would fix a piteous interrogating glance upon Geneviève, but as the latter volunteered no confidences, it was not for her to suggest or caution; so she held her peace, contenting herself with praying, night and morning, for the triumph of the righteous and the discomfiture of the wicked, and inwardly attaching a

specific application to her petition which her idea of Christian charity forbade her to state in plain terms.

Autumn was now stealing on apace, and the day following that of Lord Courtney's friendly mission proved dull, damp, and foggy. Towards afternoon Mr. Gervis, who had a touch of rheumatism and had been vainly trying, all day, to find some place near the library fire free from piercing draughts, grew restless, and, donning a fur-lined coat, had himself driven down to Beachborough to call upon his old friend Mrs. Knowles. He had of late fallen into the habit of occasionally dropping in towards five o'clock to beg for a cup of tea in South Crescent, where he knew that he could count upon a welcome, and possibly also upon a little of that tacit sympathy for which even the hardest-hearted of men must sometimes experience a craving. These two people, so dissimilar in tastes, opinions, and ways of life, were yet mutually attached. Each had soon recognized in the other a fund of sagacity enlivened by a keen sense of the drier kind of humor; each found the other an amusing study. They understood one another, or at least they fancied they did so; which, for all ordinary purposes, is much the same thing. But there was a stronger link than any of these between them in the common memory of a far-away time when George III. had only just ceased to reign, and railways were not, and the Knowleses of Stone Hall used to drive up to London once in every two years or so, in a heavy carriage drawn by four post-horses—of a merry little society whose members, for the most part, had been gathered to their fathers many years back—of who knows what foolish old jokes and quarrels and reconciliations and forgotten scandals? These two, then, would have become cronies for old sake's sake, if for no other reason; nor was the harmony of their relations likely to be interrupted, during the remainder of their earthly course, either by diversity of opinion or the amiable calumny of friends, or indeed by anything, unless perhaps, for a time, by some freak on the part of the lady, whose temper has ever been counted a trifle uncertain.

Possibly Mrs. Knowles may herself have been suffering from some one of the aches and pains incidental to advanced years when Gervis came shivering into her drawing-room to bemoan his rheumatism; for it was clear that something had ruffled her; and instead of condoling with her visitor, she merely threw up her head and snorted, after a fashion that she has when the weaknesses of her fellow-mortals are more than usually apparent to her.

"Serve you right!" quoth she, unfeelingly. "Rheumatism indeed! I should think so, when you take no healthy exercise,

and go about with a thing like that" (pointing with supreme contempt at Mr. Gervis's sable-lined coat) "on your shoulders! How much younger are you than I? Ten years?—fifteen years? Yes, I must be fifteen years your senior, if I am a day, and yet I believe I could make a better bargain with an insurance company than you could. You don't see me lolling about in arm-chairs, and, please God, you never will. I have no patience with people who wear out their constitutions when they are young, and then grumble because they are good for nothing at threescore years and ten."

"Ah, there at least I have the advantage of you," remarked Gervis, placidly. "I have an abundance of patience, if I have nothing else. And that is very fortunate, because all you good people hereabouts seem determined to give me every opportunity of exercising it. For the rest, I fully admit your superiority to me, both in body and mind. I am a mere wreck."

"Hum! I shall not contradict you. You have only yourself to thank. If you had led a decent, respectable life, as an English gentleman should, you would have been able to enjoy a day's shooting or a gallop after the hounds now as well as anybody. As it is, I believe you enjoy nothing."

"Except a cup of your tea and your conversation; and they are both so excellent, you know. You are already favoring me with a delightful sample of the one; might I be made quite happy with a little of the other?"

"Oh yes, you shall have your tea," answered Mrs. Knowles, ringing the bell. "It is a poor sort of drink for a man; but there!—I dare say it keeps you from worse habits. You were saying that somebody had been trying your patience."

"Not somebody; everybody. Or rather they have all been endeavoring to do so. It is true that they have not met with much success; but that is only because I happen to be protected by an armor of indifference which I will modestly defy any one's impertinence to pierce. An ordinary man might certainly find it rather surprising that everybody within a radius of fifteen miles or so should assume the right to lecture him and offer him advice upon his domestic affairs."

Mrs. Knowles said, "Not at all surprising. Were people to let a man fall asleep, and drive into a morass, without shouting to him?"

Mr. Gervis replied that a man who was driving his own horses in his own way, and was not at all asleep, would be justified in turning round and swearing at any fool who made him jump by yelling after him.

"Maybe so," said Mrs. Knowles in a determined voice; "but you are not going to put me off like that, let me tell you.

What do you propose to do with that boy of yours? Answer me that."

"I propose," answered Gervis slowly, "to do nothing with him. I propose, within certain limits, to let him do what he likes with himself. He is of age."

"So the blind man's parents in the Gospel said, when they wanted to shirk responsibility. The truth is, Vincent Gervis, that you have been a selfish man all your life, and soon you will reap the crop you have sown, as it is just and proper that you should. I say nothing about your daughter; because you could not be expected to know how to bring up a girl, and you have very judiciously left her in the hands of that worthy old Potts, who does know. Moreover, I have a notion that her will is as strong as yours, and that she will choose her husband for herself, when the time comes, whether you like it or whether you don't. But I tell you plainly that you have not done your duty by Claud. You want a companion forsooth to sail with you to Hongkong or Yokohama, or some such heathenish places, and so you take the lad away from school at the most critical time of his life; you interrupt his education; you stuff his head full of cynical maxims and show him the world before he can understand it; and finally you cast him loose, without a profession or occupation of any sort or kind to scare the devil away with. I should like to know what you think will become of him. If he does not go to the bad, it will be no thanks to you, my friend. You have been kind to him after a fashion, because, I suppose, you happened to get on well together; but in my opinion he owes you nothing: and if you expect him to honor his father, you are expecting too much, and will in all probability be disappointed."

"I am not so unreasonable," answered Gervis, sipping his tea. "Your description of me, my dear Mrs. Knowles, is delightfully accurate; and I am sure you will be pleased to hear that I have not a word to say for myself. I suppose nothing can be more certain than that I ought to have put Claud into some profession. I have no objection, however, to telling you, as an old friend, how it was that I came to remove him from Eton. I was under the impression at the time that I should not live through another year. My doctor gave me to understand as much, and I naturally supposed that he knew what he was talking about. Under the circumstances, I thought it advisable that Claud should see something of the world (I did not take him to Yokohama, by the by) before finding himself burdened with a considerable fortune, and other cares which I need not enter upon. I feel that I owe him an apology for surviving; and, what with rheumatism and one thing and an-

other, this world is really not such an abode of bliss that I should be very reluctant to leave it. But it is not my fault that I am still here, is it?"

"Well, no," answered Mrs. Knowles, somewhat mollified. "And I am sure I hope you have a long lease of life yet to run. But all this must have been a good five years ago."

"Quite so. I understand what you mean; and I plead guilty. However, what is done is done. I can't put him into a cavalry regiment now; and, as a *pis-aller*, I intend, as I said before, to let him follow his own devices. Also, as I said before, within certain limits. Can you suggest any improvement upon that design?"

Mrs. Knowles rubbed her chin. "I don't know that I can. The question is, what are his devices, and what do yo mean by certain limits?"

Mr. Gervis laid his head on one side, and smiled without replying. Thereupon Mrs. Knowles had a sudden return of irritation. "Well, well," said she; "I am only an old woman, and I don't suppose I shall do any good by meddling. Let us change the subject. How long are you going to remain at Southlands? Why don't you go off somewhere in that yacht of yours, since you dislike this climate so much?"

"I shall never yacht any more," answered Gervis. "I am getting too old to like being tossed about. I shall stay where I am, I think; or, if it becomes quite intolerable here, perhaps I may go up to London for a time. But I can send Claud away at any moment, if that is what you mean. We understand one another's ways; and really, do you know, he has more common sense than you give him credit for."

Mrs. Knowles shook her head, and murmured that these things were not a question of common sense; but she did not mention to what things she alluded; nor did Mr. Gervis ask her to explain herself.

"Did you ever chance," he inquired, after a short interval of silence, "to come across an amphibious being of the name of Burvill in any of your charitable expeditions?"

"Oh dear, yes; and a lazy, good-for-nothing old sot he is too. Has he been imposing upon you, eh?"

"Not exactly that; but it happened that, a short time ago, I was in a position to do him a small service; and by way of showing his gratitude, he came up, the other day, to blacken the character of some of my friends, and to warn me solemnly against nursing vipers in my bosom. It appears that I am an object of solicitude to all classes."

"Did he? I should never have given the man credit for so much good feeling. You may put it as you like, but to my

mind it speaks well for him that he should have troubled himself at all in the matter. It really was a thoughtful thing to do."

"Was it not? He could have done no more if he had been the lord-lieutenant himself—and so I told him. Only, as he was not the lord-lieutenant, and could therefore be insulted with impunity, I made so bold as to add that he was a malicious rascal, and probably a liar into the bargain. After which, I gave him half-a-crown and commended him to the keeping of the devil."

"What a shocking way of speaking! I wonder he didn't knock you down."

"I gave him the half-crown first, you see."

"And what, pray, was it that he told you?" asked Mrs. Knowles, who, I fear, is not altogether exempt from that feminine inquisitiveness, which she condemns so strongly in younger people.

"Well, he brought some specific charges against Miss Flemyng, I believe," answered Gervis, getting up slowly, and struggling into his coat. "If I remember rightly, he had seen her kissing somebody—her father, no doubt, or one of her brothers, who, I am told, assemble here in large numbers towards Christmas-time. But, to tell you the truth, Mrs. Knowles, I did not care to pursue the subject, feeling that it was one which could never possess even the remotest interest for me. I am afraid I must tear myself away now. Many thanks for your tea and your well-deserved rebuke. It will interest you to hear that I am aching from head to foot, and have every prospect of a sleepless night before me in which to ponder it."

And so Mr. Gervis took his leave.

Mrs. Knowles has an ancient and valuable maid, who has dressed and undressed her for a trifle of half a century, and to whom she confides some of the vexations of the day before going to sleep. After she had hoisted herself into bed that night she sat up, and thus addressed this trusty attendant:

"Forbes, I am troubled in my mind. There is a very nice young gentleman of my acquaintance who has fallen deeply i love with a young lady who may have her faults, but who taking her all in all, may pass for a tolerably nice young lady, as young ladies go. He is too young to marry; and if anything had come of this, very likely I should have been sorry; but now nothing is going to come of it, and I am still more sorry."

"Dear, dear! have the young lady refused him, mum?" Forbes asks, with sympathetic interest.

"Not she! But you see, Forbes, my young gentleman is

dependent upon a father, who has about as much heart in him as a jelly-fish. So there will be weeping and wailing, and everything will go wrong. Ah, well! I dare say they will get over it."

"They generally do, mum," observes the sagacious Forbes, withdrawing without asking for further information. Probably her mistress could have told her nothing that she had not known, and fully discussed with Mr. Hicks, long ago.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DAYS THAT ARE NO MORE.

IT will be seen, from the brief conversation reported at the end of the last chapter, that Mrs. Knowles, despite the hard common sense with which she is universally credited, has in her heart that love of romance and fellow-feeling for young lovers which all good women retain up to their dying day. It is probable, however, that in watching the love-making of others from her present standpoint, she may have forgotten some few of the sensations incidental to that delightful process, and have imagined that, when two people are attached to one another, the fact must be as obvious to themselves as to lookers-on. For we all know what strange tricks perspective will play with distant views, and certainly it is some little time since my grandfather went courting under the elms on summer mornings, *anno Domini* 1817. Mrs. Knowles, then, perceived that the course of Claud's love was not likely to run smooth, but saw no obstacle in its way, save the sufficiently formidable one of Mr. Gervis's opposition; and doubtless she would have been both surprised and amused had she known that our modest hero was losing a large part of his proper share of sleep every night through the dread, not of paternal prohibition (to which danger, indeed, he had not given a thought), but of unrequited affection.

It is true that he was already almost accepted as one of the family at the Moated House, that Mr. Flemyng's demeanor towards him had entered upon a quasi-benedictory phase, and that Miss Flemyng herself, though not exactly appearing to seek his society, was generally careful to provide him with some excellent pretext for seeking hers; but all this seemed to prove very little, when set against sundry agonies of jealousy roused by Nina's reception of other young men, who, in the natural course of things, visited at the house every now and again. There was one terrible day when the officious dragoon

before alluded to tooled the regimental drag over from Lynchester, and, after remaining to luncheon and monopolizing the whole conversation, actuallly took Miss Flemyng away for a long drive. He had brought the colonel's wife with him, so that it was all quite right and proper, and he omitted to offer a seat to Claud, whose presence, in fact, he had persistently ignored from the first. Upon another occasion there turned up a certain yachtsman of engaging personal appearance, but with disgustingly free manners, who had put into Beachborough for a day, and who was easily prevailed upon to dine at the Moated House. This interloper not only devoted himself exclusively to his fair hostess, but had the bad taste to entertain her with allusions to persons and places of which others present knew nothing: while she, alas! encouraged him, listened with interest to his pointless anecdotes, laughed at his feeble jokes, remained for an unconscionable time alone with him in the garden after dinner, and finally gave him a rose to take away with him.

At such times as these Claud would inwardly rage and fume, heaping vituperative epithets upon himself and others, and declaring to himself that the girl was a heartless coquette, that he had been a fool to take her seriously, and that he would assuredly do so no longer. It was all supremely ridiculous, no doubt; but it seems just possible that some reader of these words may remember to have been almost as absurd himself, once upon a time, and will therefore make allowances for Claud's temporary idiocy. Moreover, Nina was unquestionably even more capricious and perplexing in her ways than the generality of her charming sex. One day she would be melancholy, dreamy, sentimental; the next she would affect a hardened disbelief in all the finer feelings of our nature, and would nip every approach to tenderness in the bud by laughter too hearty to be feigned. Sometimes she was discouragingly silent, sometimes she was friendly; sometimes she looked bored, and confessed that she was so with every appearance of sincerity. I can't tell what occult pleasure the feminine mind derives from conduct of this sort, nor why young women should thus delight in torturing their prey—what should I, *cælebs*, know of such matters?—but I am given to understand that, to borrow Mrs. Forbes's comprehensive expression, "they generally do." Doubtless they understand what they are about, and are aware that there are very few lovers in the world so faint-hearted as to be dissuaded from their purpose by the vagaries of the beloved object. Certainly Claud was not one of these, sundry asseverations, prompted by jealousy, notwithstanding. Like all his family, he had an immense supply of latent obstinacy, and, hav-

ing once realized that Nina Flemyng was absolutely necessary to his happiness, he registered an inward vow that, sooner or later, she should bear his name.

At a subsequent period of his life he was kind enough to inform me of the exact date on which this modest determination was arrived at.

"It was on the 23d of September—a soft, misty, melancholy sort of afternoon—and I was walking through the woods towards the church, where I knew that she was helping the parson's daughters to put up the harvest decorations. I don't know whether it was the sight of the falling leaves and the feeling that summer was dead and gone, or whether it was the remembrance of some vague hints which the governor had let fall, at breakfast-time, about sending me round in the yacht to meet him at Marseilles; but somehow or other, it seemed to come over me all of a sudden that there would have to be an end to all this, and that I was very near it. I dare say you will hardly believe me; but it is the simple truth that, up to that moment, I had never once asked myself what that end was to be."

Here Claud's ingenuous biographer expresses much surprise; and the young man continues: "Don't misunderstand me. Of course I had known all along that, in a general sort of way, love leads to marriage, just as life leads to death—you needn't smile; I am not suggesting any analogies—but till then I had not thought much more about my wedding than I do now about my funeral; and, between ourselves, I doubt very much whether anybody ever does turn his mind to either of those ceremonies before he is obliged. Well, you know, there always comes a time when one has to face realities; and it came to me that afternoon in the woods. I could show you the very spot where I stood under a beech-tree, and swore that Nina Flemyng should be Nina Gervis. You know with what result; but this was the way of it."

Claud has a sufficiently graphic, though somewhat disjointed, method of narration. Perhaps the subsequent events of that memorable afternoon may as well be related in his words as in mine.

"It was past five o'clock, and growing dark in that gray weather, when I got to the church. I pushed the door open softly, and peeped in. There she was, on the steps leading up to the chancel, holding a wreath of hops in her hand with a group of those sturdy Pardoe girls a little below her, and St. John, the curate, in his cassock, by her side. I never could stand that fellow—I don't know why. They had twined hops round the pillars, and stuck wheat and barley everywhere, and

filled the embrasures of the windows with the kindly fruits of the earth, in the shape of turnips and swedes and I don't know what other appropriate monstrosities, and now, I suppose, they were taking a final complacent survey of their handiwork. Can't you see it all?—the little dark church, with its hideous modern east-window looking quite soft and beautiful in the twilight; Jacky and Tommy, evidently up to some mischief or other, moving stealthily about in the background; the Miss Pardoes, thickset, robust specimens of the British maiden; the priest in his long *soutane;* and that perfect figure standing out from among them all, like—like—upon my word, I don't know what she was like. I was insanely in love at the time, and perhaps I may have compared her mentally to some saintly apparition, surrounded by a knot of mere mortals—which simile, I see, has the effect of choking you with suppressed laughter. Laugh out loud, if you like; don't mind me. Saint or sinner, there never was a more exquisitely-formed creature; and who with eyes in his head could have helped adoring her beauty?

"After a time the children caught sight of the manly shape in the doorway, and came running up to whisper to me that they had concealed a string of onions in the pulpit and had put some hard turnips under the cushions of the Rectory pew, in the corner where fat Mrs. Pardoe used to sit. And then the others turned round, and advanced down the aisle in a little procession; and very soon we had all said good night, and she and I were walking back through the woods together. We had got rid of the children, I forget by what stratagem, and were tolerably certain of not encountering another human being on our way. So you see, if opportunity was what I wanted, there was nothing to complain of.

"She was in one of her silent, abstracted moods, and I remember that neither of us spoke a word for quite a long time—not until we were well into the thick of the woods. Then I said something about not having known before that she was such a zealous churchwoman (for just before we started, I had heard that fellow St. John reproaching her with her long neglect of the daily services); and I asked her whether she had a weakness for forms and ceremonies.

"'I go in for them by fits and starts,' she answered. 'When I am sick of the world, I fall back upon the Church—for a week or two. Once upon a time I used to fancy I should like to be a very good woman; and I did make one vigorous attempt. For about two months I got on capitally. I fasted all through Lent, and rose at unearthly hours, so as to be present at matins, where the congregation generally consisted of the Pardoes and myself, and I studied a number of pretty little illuminated

books, which Mr. St. John gave me, and altogether discharged my duties in a manner that gave satisfaction to the clergy of the parish. But when it came to the chapter of good works I broke down. I couldn't stand stuffy cottages and dirty people, who had unpleasant things the matter with them and delighted in thrusting horrors under my very nose. I gave it all up, and fell back into my old bad ways. The London season happened to be in full swing at the time; so I got an invitation from somebody, and fled; and since then I have confined my religious exercises to decorating the church and singing in the choir.'

"'You do visit the poor sometimes, all the same,' I put in. For you see, I did not choose that my ideal should have any flaws; and it is a fact that, only a few days before, she had refused to go out riding with me on the plea that she had to take some port wine to an old woman in the village.

"'That was only a bit of show-off,' she answered coolly, when I reminded her of this incident. 'I wanted to make an impression upon you. If you hadn't been there, the wine would have been sent down by a servant, as usual.'

"I told her plainly that I had two good reasons for disbelieving that assertion. First: that I knew perfectly well that she never tried to impose upon anybody (which was true, mind you), and second: that I could not flatter myself that she cared so much as that for my good opinion. 'Besides,' I added, 'my opinion of you was formed long ago—if that is of any importance—and no self-disparagement of yours is likely to alter it.'

"At that she laughed. 'You are a poet,' she said; 'your imagination turns geese into swans, and women into angels. And after all, why not? I only wish I could feel as you do.'

"And then she began quoting some lines out of that silly little volume of mine. It *was* a silly little collection of rubbish, eh, Knowles?"

Claud, at the time of this conversation, was in a position to listen with equanimity to criticisms upon his earlier efforts; so I felt no difficulty in replying that *Here and There* was not, in my poor judgment, likely to add much to its author's fame.

"Yes—well—I know. But supposing that you were a very young author and very much in love, and that you were hearing the most adorable voice in the world reciting your compositions in a soft undertone, don't you think you would discover beauties in them whose existence you had never suspected before? I am not more vain than another, but I am free to confess that, as I listened, my own feeble words sounded as musical to me as any that Alfred de Musset had ever written. It was a little song that she quoted—some stanzas headed 'Les Bienheureux,'

the burden of which was that there was no need for men to be forever straining their eyes towards some far-away future heaven, since heaven was here, around us, for those who were not too blind to discern it. *Cïeux—yeux—bienheureux*—you perceive how easily the beauties of Nature, the achievements of art and the smiles of the beloved could be made to furnish the requisite number of lines and rhymes. Now that I am grown so old and wise, and know the world so well, I have of course found out that these sentiments have neither the advantage of novelty nor of truth to recommend them; but in spite of that, and of—other changes that have taken place, I love the old song still, and every now and then, when I am in a sentimental mood, I find myself humming it over *sotto voce*. It isn't of the meaning of the words that I think—'See-saw, Margery Daw' would do as well—but of those autumn woods, and the fading gray light, and Nina walking beside me in her tight-fitting homespun dress. I was absurdly flattered and delighted at this proof of her having studied my works. I could not at all express what I felt, and stammered out I hardly remember what incoherent rhapsodies, to which she seemed to lend a rather inattentive ear. She interrupted me without ceremony when we reached an open space, where they had been cutting down, and where numbers of faggots were piled up, ready to be carted away. A sudden idea had occurred to her.

"'Let us sit down and make a fire,' she said. 'If there is a thing I love, it is a fire out of doors; and my hands are frozen.'

"I hesitated for a moment; for I knew very little of country life at that time, and I was not sure whether we might not be arrested for stealing wood, or run some risk of burning down the whole plantation. But, dear me! I would have set the Thames on fire, or tried to do so, if she had ordered it; so I collected the driest sticks I could find, and very soon, with the help of some old letters which she produced from her pocket, we had kindled as cheery a bonfire as you could wish to see, and she was sitting on the ground, holding up her hands to the blaze. Such hands! I don't know whether you have ever happened to notice them; but if you have, you must be aware that they are Nina's strongest point. As I saw them then, with the red light of the flames shining between the taper fingers, and striking out flashes from the diamond rings upon them, I thought to myself that they could have no rivals in the world. And for that matter, I think so still.

"Well; I sat for some time, watching those marvellous hands in speechless admiration, and listening to the crackling of the sticks, and to another strange sound that there was in the air. Do you know the noise that distant flocks of sheep make when

they are being driven into fold in the evening? It is a most curious, indescribable sound like a continuous murmur of human voices rising and falling in the far, far distance—a mournful uncanny kind of sound. I can never hear it now without a sick sensation of regret and yearning, and—but no matter. You would never understand how the bleating of a prosaic sheep could suggest romantic fancies to anybody. Between ourselves, I tried once to make it the theme of a poetical fragment; but I found that it really wouldn't do.

"I was saying that I sat for a long time beside her, without saying a word. You see, we had passed beyond the region of small-talk. If I had opened my lips at all, I must have blurted out a passionate declaration; and this I would not do; because, if you must know the truth, I was frightened. It was all very well to assure myself that I must succeed, and would; but when it came to the push, how could I help feeling that it was the height of audacity in me to aspire to the heart of this beautiful and fastidious creature, and that it would be quite in accordance with what I knew of her if she were to receive my vows with a peal of laughter?

"However, I kept edging nearer and nearer to her, as she sat, lost in thought, staring at the leaping flames; and at last she turned her head all of a sudden, and looked at me. And then—ah, my dear Knowles, I am not going to tell you what happened then. With your experience and your imaginative gifts, you ought to have no difficulty in filling up a blank space of ten minutes or so. Anyhow, I don't care to talk much about it. Good Heavens! how happy I was! I wonder how many times I made her repeat 'I love you!—I love you!' It all seemed too wonderful, too beautiful to be real; and if I could have made Time stand still then, the world would never have grown any older from that day to this. It was perfect felicity. I wanted nothing more. It only comes once in a lifetime; that sort of thing, doesn't it? Or do you think, as she did, that love is a kind of intermittent fever, which occurs at regular intervals, runs its course, and leaves the patient no worse than he was before?

"I don't know what ecstatic nonsense I may have talked during those first moments of bliss; but no doubt I said something about that absurd wish of mine that all the future could be condensed into one long present; for I well remember how she brought me back to my senses with a laugh that ended in a sigh.

"'You are like me then,' she said; 'you are afraid of the future.'

"'Afraid?' I echoed. 'No, I am not afraid; why should I

be? All I intended to say was that no future can be *better* than this.'

"'No,' she said; 'there never can be anything better. We are both happy now. It is all very sweet and beautiful; but it will not last—and that is the pity of it.'

"She had said, or at least hinted, as much to me a hundred times before; and I had been used to laugh at her and call her a cynic and a pessimist when she expounded her dreary views of human life and character; but it vexed me that she should take up that tune then, and I asked her rather indignantly whether she doubted me. She made no reply; so I said, 'Perhaps you are not sure of yourself.'

"'Perhaps not,' she answered, quietly and sadly.

"This was dreadful. I withdrew my arm from her waist; I dropped her hand, and stammered out that, if that were so—if that were so— The remainder of my sentence somehow stuck in my throat.

"But she took my hand again, and began turning the ring on my little finger round and round, while she spoke in that caressing voice of hers. 'Don't be angry with me. Don't let us quarrel already. Is it my fault that I can't, for the life of me, help seeing the truth? I wish I didn't. It would be much pleasanter if I could deceive myself, as other people do. I know you love me, Claud; and if you could look into my heart, you would find that I love you too, beyond everything in the world. What more can I say? If you think that we shall go on forever loving each other as we do now, you are wrong. It can't be so. It never was so, and it never will be. What made you fall in love with me? You won't answer me truly; and perhaps you don't know. But I know. It was because I have a pretty face, which you will tire of in a year or two, and which will grow ugly besides. It was because your fancy was taken by something in my manner of talking or walking, or I don't know what about me. But you will get familiar with all that, and it will soon lose its charm. Love is not eternal. There is a sober kind of steady affection which may succeed to it, if all goes well; but that is not the same thing; and when one looks at the households of one's friends, and when one remembers all the worries and misunderstandings that are sure to crop up between two people who have to live together, it seems as if the chances were against even so much as that. And as for the love that you and I have now, and would die rather than lose, it must go. We shall lose it, and we shall not die, or want to die—there is the curse of humanity. People persuade themselves that love will last forever—at all events in their own case. Just in the same way nine-tenths of the world

persuade themselves there is a God and a future life—not because they are convinced, but because it would be too miserable to doubt. That is why I go in for religion by fits and starts, as I told you just now. For, after all, I am made of the same clay as the rest of them, and am only a woman besides. Sometimes I can humbug myself a little; but when my head is quite clear and my eyes wide open, I see, as Solomon saw, that all things are altogether vanity, and that there is one end to all, and that all that cometh is vanity.'

"I can't tell you how long she went on in this strain. I have never heard her speak with anything like the same seriousness upon any subject since. I haven't repeated the half of what she said, and of course it is impossible to make you understand the horrible conviction that her words seemed to carry with them. But it was hardly likely that I should allow myself to yield to the influence of such gloomy forebodings. I listened as long as I could, and when I could not bear it any longer, I stopped her. I broke out into an excited tirade, which I won't inflict upon you; I swore that, whatever the love of other men might be, mine should end only with my existence, and that I would make her love me too in the same way, in spite of all. And then she drew me towards her, and stroked my hair, and called me a foolish boy; and so we made friends. Oh, dear! I think I have talked nearly enough now, haven't I? How infernally hot this room is! My drink is finished, and my tale is told, and my cigar is gone out, and it is high time for you to be in bed, old Knowles. Give me a tumbler of something with ice in it, and let us be off."

Claud dined with me, the other day, at my club, and afterwards made the foregoing confession to me in the smoking-room, where I noticed that a good many of the members stared at him, wondering perhaps who was the handsome, foreign-looking fellow who was discoursing with such a profusion of gesture and animation to his friend with the grizzled beard. Possibly some of them may have known already; for Claud's name has been mentioned with tolerable frequency in London of late.

But it is in the events of his past, not of his present life, that the reader is supposed to be interested.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MR. GERVIS'S VIEWS.

CLAUD returned to Southlands in such a state of radiant happiness, his behavior during dinner was marked by so much absence of mind and indifference to the food set before him, and his answers to the most ordinary questions were of so ridiculously irrelevant a character, that he might just as well have divulged the events of the afternoon there and then. He preferred, however, to keep what he was pleased to consider his secret all to himself for another twelve hours; and no doubt he went to bed as happy as a king, and slept more soundly than he had any right to do under the circumstances.

But in due course came the morning, and with it the disagreeable necessity for a few words with the head of the family —a necessity rendered doubly disagreeable by that gentleman's demeanor at breakfast. It cannot be said that Mr. Gervis was ever in a bad temper, properly so called; but there were days on which it was useless to expect anything from him in the shape of sympathy, pity, or favor; and those who knew him best had learnt to discern the advent of one of these stormy periods by certain infallible signs. For instance, a particular attention to dress was evidence, so to speak, of unsettled atmospheric conditions; great deference of manner and melliffuousness of language might be taken to mean, "Barometer falling; hoist south cone;" and a short dry cough recurring at frequent intervals, indicated the approach of a large and deep depression. Now when our luckless lover saw his father arrayed in a perfectly new suit of blue serge; when he heard solicitous inquiries addressed to Miss Potts on the subject of her cold and apologies to Geneviève for the trouble to which she was put in pouring out a second cup of coffee; when finally, he was himself greeted by the expression of a hope that he had slept well, nothing more than the subdued "Ahem!" which followed was needed to make what he had to expect obvious to him. He foresaw that his news would meet with a discouraging reception, that he would certainly be snubbed and sneered at, and that he would probably be made to feel excessively uncomfortable before he had said his say. Still, the thing had to be done, and there was no use in putting off the evil moment. So, when Mr. Gervis rose at length from the breakfast-table and walked slowly into the library, Claud followed him thither, and opened fire rather nervously.

"Governor," he began fidgeting about the room in a way which he knew that his father disliked, but which he felt, for the moment quite powerless to control, "I am going to make you laugh."

Gervis, who had already settled himself in an arm-chair and had opened a book, looked up and said "Yes?" with an air of resigned urbanity.

"You will think it utterly absurd," continued Claud incoherently, "very natural, I'm sure; and so it is, in a way—only every one must choose for himself, as I have often heard you say; and what is one man's meat is another man's poison. I know I am a great deal too young for that kind of thing—at least, from your point of view; but there again you can't lay down any hard and fast rule; and if you knew all about it from the beginning—but it's so confoundedly difficult to explain, and—" Here the speaker's voice sank into an unintelligible murmur.

"I beg your pardon a thousand times," said Gervis, suavely; "but at the risk of being considered hopelessly dull, I must confess that I have not the least idea of what you are talking about."

"I know. I haven't begun yet. I—oh, *bother!* The long and the short of it is, governor, that I am going to be married. Now!"

"That," said Mr. Gervis, with cool deliberation, "is undoubtedly a capital joke. There is a dry humor about it, and about your manner of delivering it, which I quite appreciate. But, as Lord Chesterfield justly observes, true wit never yet excited laughter; so I hope you will pardon my not bursting into a loud guffaw. Pray, when did you form this—remarkable determination?"

"Only yesterday afternoon," answered Claud, trying not to look shamefaced, and failing lamentably. "At least, things were not settled till then."

"And you let me into the secret of your plans already! Really that is most considerate of you."

After this there was a silence which Claud hardly knew how to break. Finding, however, that his father showed no disposition to help him out, he resumed, at last, timidly—

"You haven't asked the lady's name."

"Let me see. There are five unmarried ladies in the neighborhood with whom you are, I believe, tolerably intimate—Lady Croft, Mrs. Knowles, Miss Potts, Miss Croft, and Miss Flemyng. The first three may be considered, for various reasons, as ineligible; and we thus find the list narrowed to two. Perhaps I may go so far as to hazard a conjecture

that Miss Flemyng is the person whom you have honored by your preference."

Claud nodded.

"I congratulate you upon your good taste. And do I understand that you have proposed to her, and that she has accepted you?"

Claud nodded again.

"Ah! And may I inquire in what way you propose to support yourself and your wife? It is a matter of minor importance, no doubt; but it is one upon which I feel some curiosity."

The blood rushed into Claud's cheeks. This question, which to most sons placed as he was would have appeared natural and inevitable, found him wholly unprepared with a reply. His whole training had led him to regard money as a mere appendage of civilized existence, a useful article which some people were so unfortunate as to lack, but which possessed no intrinsic claim upon the attention of those who had enough of it for their wants. He had never been put upon an allowance, or requested to render an account of his expenditure. His father had paid all bills and had furnished him with what pocket-money he required, and it had not once occurred to him to regard himself in any other light than that of a rich man. While dressing, that morning, and sketching out sundry indefinite plans for the future, he had fancied it not unlikely that Southlands might be assigned to him as his residence. And now he was asked in what way he proposed to support himself! He had nothing to say, and could only stare blankly at his bland interrogator.

"Because, you know," pursued Mr. Gervis, after waiting in vain for an answer, "you are entirely dependent upon me for the necessaries of life; and I can hardly suppose you so ignorant of all my wishes and convictions as to imagine that I should supply you with the means of committing a sort of moral suicide. You have so often heard me state my views upon marriage in general, and early marriages in particular, that I feel it would be a sheer waste of time to repeat them now. Some day or other you will, no doubt take a wife; very few men have the luck or the sense to remain bachelors all their lives. But you will not (if I can prevent it) marry for many years to come; nor will you (if I can prevent it) marry Miss Flemyng."

"I swear I will never marry any one else," broke in Claud, resolutely, and rather defiantly.

"No, no; don't swear; what is the use? Your common sense must tell you that you are entirely in my power, and that you have no alternative but to yield to my wishes, whether

you think them unreasonable or not. I am sorry for you; but it can't be helped."

"I am of age," said Claud.

"Yes; but I hold the purse-strings; so that, for all practical purposes, you might just as well be an infant."

Claud turned on his heel, and walked away to the window. He was determined not to lose his temper, and just at that moment he could not trust himself to speak. For some minutes he remained gazing out at the gray landscape and the leaves that were whirling down from the trees in the park; then he came back slowly, and stood, with one elbow upon the mantel-piece, looking down upon his father.

"Listen, governor. If you have a strong will, so have I. We won't quarrel over it; but if one of us is to yield, I shall not be that one. I can't deny your power to keep me for some time to come in a condition of slavery, or, as you say, infancy; but this I want to know: have you brought about this absurd state of affairs deliberately and designedly? Because, if so, I think I have a fair right to say that no one was ever more unjustly treated. It seems to me that I was entitled to one of two things—either to be brought up as the heir to a considerable property, and to be given a sufficient income to live as heirs of rich men generally do, or to be put in the way of earning my own livelihood. As for being kept like a pet dog, and allowed every luxury, provided I do not disobey my master, I tell you frankly that that does not suit me at all, and that I will not submit to it one hour longer than is absolutely necessary. I would rather break stones on the road."

"Yes; that is your case," said Mr. Gervis calmly, "and I admit that it is a strong one. I will recur to it presently. In the mean time, allow me very briefly to state my own. To begin with, I need scarcely point out to you that in what I do I can have no other aim than to serve your interests. Were I to consult my personal comfort, I should let everybody go to the deuce in his own way; for if I have a weakness, it is for peace and quietness, and if there is one thing that I dislike more than another, it is a scene such as we are now struggling through—with some degree of propriety, I am glad to say; still with much discomfort on both sides. To expect you to believe that I know better than you do what is for your happiness would be to expect a miracle; nevertheless, so it is; and I have to shape my conduct in accordance with facts, not fancies. I might, of course, have put a stop to your little *affaire de cœur* long ago; but it seemed to me much wiser not to interfere. *Affaires de cœur* are very good things, and, at your age, simply inevitable. They elevate, they refine, they give

knowledge of feminine nature, which is a very necessary subject for men of the world to be acquainted with; and some people, I believe, find them pleasant to look back upon in after life. According to my lights, nothing more fortunate can happen to a young fellow than to fall in love with an agreeable, clever married woman a few years older than himself, and, if possible, a step or two above him in rank. There is little or no risk in affairs of that description, and as a part of education they are invaluable. Young girls are less improving and more dangerous; because in their case the question of marriage is apt to crop up, and—"

"Excuse my interrupting you," said Claud, who had listened to this leisurely dissertation with ill-disguised impatience; "but will you tell me whether you have any objection to urge against Nina individually?"

"We need not go into that. I have no desire to hurt your feelings, and your opinion of the young person's merits will probably not be influenced by mine."

"Probably not; but I should like to hear your opinion, if you don't mind."

"As you please. I should object, then, to Miss Flemyng as a daughter-in-law under any circumstances. I have studied her a little, and if it were at all worth while, I could give you many excellent reasons for my objection. However, two of them will answer the purpose, being quite conclusive. She is selfish and she is greedy of admiration. With women of that stamp domestic life is an impossibility, *pure et simple*."

"You will judge Nina differently some day," observed Claud. "I am willing to wait until you shall be better acquainted with her."

"So am I—more than willing. Now, if you please, we will pass to the second part of our subject. You have found my remarks a little incoherent hitherto, I dare say."

"Not at all," said Claud politely.

"Ah—well, they were meant to be incoherent, at any rate. As regards your financial position, I shall endeavor, on the contrary, to be perfectly lucid. You complain—very reasonably, I think—that you have neither been educated for a profession nor allowed the quasi-independence of a rich man's son. Now I am, I suppose, about the very worst man of business in Europe. I have always hated money-matters, and have never troubled myself about them. At the present moment I am, I believe, tolerably well off; but it happens that my fortune is subject to sudden and indefinite calls, which have already obliged me to sell out investments, which have increased of late years, and will probably continue to increase; and whether,

at my death, you will find yourself what is called a rich man is really more than I can tell you. Taking everything into consideration, I have decided to put you henceforth upon an allowance of seven hundred pounds a year. Upon that allowance you ought to be able to live comfortably, and under no circumstances whatever will it be augmented. Be so good as to fix that fact in your mind once and for all. I need not tell you that whenever it suits you to live here, or on board the yacht, or in my *étage* in Paris, you will be heartily welcome to do so; but I wish you distinctly to understand that from this day you are entirely free and your own master. You will come and go as you like, and as often as you like. I shall not question your movements, nor attempt to exercise any control over them. If this arrangement meets with your approval I shall be very glad; but at the same time, I may as well tell you that I shall neither make nor even discuss any other."

Claud considered for a short space. "I don't think I could reasonably ask for anything more," he said, at length. "It has all come upon me rather suddenly, and I don't know that I see my way quite clearly as yet. Do you mean that I am to have seven hundred pounds a year from to-day, to do as I like with?"

"That," said Mr. Gervis, "is what I mean."

"Because, if so, I must repeat what I said before, that I intend to marry Nina Flemyng, and nobody else; and it appears to me that we could set up house very well upon seven hundred pounds a year. Would you withdraw the allowance if I married against your wishes?"

"My dear fellow," said Mr. Gervis, "I have no doubt that there are several good stout ropes in different parts of this establishment, with any one of which you could satisfactorily hang yourself, if you were so minded. I am not going to have them all withdrawn in order to remove temptation from your way. There are certain lines of conduct against which no one, except a congenital idiot, requires to be protected, and when I said just now that you should not marry Miss Flemyng, if I could prevent it, I never meant to imply that I should use other than rational means of prevention. For a man of your habits to marry upon seven hundred pounds a year is practically an impossibility. I have a firm conviction that your own good sense will tell you that much, when you have had time to consider of it."

"Hundreds and thousands of people marry upon less," returned Claud; "but let us waive that question. Surely you must see that, even if I were too selfish to like the prospect of economy and discomfort, I should still be bound in honor to

carry out my engagement. I wonder what you think I ought to say to Nina this afternoon?"

"That, my good friend, is your affair, not mine. However, if I were in your predicament, I should simply lay the bare facts before her, and leave her to draw her own conclusions from them. I may have formed a mistaken estimate of her character, but my confident expectation is that she will call me bad names, shed some natural tears, but dry them soon, and send you about your business."

"*My* confident expectation is that she will do nothing of the kind. You must remember that she knows what it is to be hard up, and that what you consider a miserable pittance may appear a decent enough provision to her. I hope and believe that she will think so, and that, having accepted me when she supposed me to be a rich man, she won't throw me over, now that she finds me to be a poor one."

"Very well. I must warn you, though, that if you marry, I shall no longer be able to offer you quarters here or elsewhere. For you there will be room, but for a wife and an indefinite number of squalling infants there certainly will not. I believe that pretty well exhausts what I have to say upon the subject I have done my best for you, and I wash my hands of all responsibility as regards the future."

"I perfectly understand that my life belongs to myself, and that I alone am answerable for what is made of it," said Claud. "I ask for nothing better; and you may depend upon it that I will give you no trouble in a pecuniary way. Well, I must be going now." He made for the door, as he spoke; but when his hand was upon the lock, he paused, and looked back. Gervis had drawn his arm-chair close to the fire, and was stooping over it, one thin, transparent hand extended to the blaze, the other, which shook a little, holding up the open volume of Balzac which had been laid aside half an hour before. Something pathetic in the attitude of the bending figure, which was that of an old man, despite its slimness, and the somewhat youthful cut of its garb, touched Claud's heart with a twinge of pity and compunction. A hundred memories of bygone days and bygone kindnesses recurred to him as he looked; and all at once he seemed to realize the utter isolation of that queer old man who had gone through the world forgiving injuries with cool contempt, relieving the needy with a sneer, never doing an ungenerous action nor speaking a generous word—understood by few, hated by many, and loved by none, unless it were by the son who was now abandoning him without one sign of regret. Our young prodigal was as soft-hearted a sinner as ever set forth to face this world of sorrow and disappointment; and it

needed no diet of husks to rouse his dormant sense of filial duty. He recrossed the room, and laid his hand gently upon his father's shoulder.

"Governor," said he, "we've knocked about a great deal together, and we've had some good days, and there have been jokes, and there have been troubles, and—and we've been the best of friends through it all, haven't we? Don't let us quarrel now."

Mr. Gervis closed his book, keeping one finger in it to mark the place, and looked up, with an air of some surprise. "I assure you," he said, "I have not the slightest intention of quarreling with you—or with anybody. Quarreling is ill-bred and silly; and really, when you come to think of it, nothing in the world is worth the trouble of quarreling about. We have, as you truly say, been good friends, and during the last few years we have seen a great deal of each other. Whether we shall continue to do so will depend entirely upon yourself. All this is very wearing; but for once in a way I suppose it must be gone through. I quoted Lord Chesterfield to you just now; perhaps I can't explain my feelings towards you better than by quoting him again. 'As I have no womanish weakness for your person,' says he, in one of his letters to his son, 'your merit must, and will, be the only measure of my kindness.' And all through his correspondence you will continually come across such phrases as, 'To talk of natural affection is talking nonsense'—'Be persuaded that I shall love you as long as you deserve it, and not one moment longer'—and so forth. I don't go quite that length. I am not prepared to assert that there is no such thing as natural affection; though you may certainly look upon me as wholly devoid of it; nor do I pretend that the affection which I have for you will be increased or diminished according to your merits. Speeches of that description are out of date, and were never quite sincerely uttered, I should imagine. But this I will say—that there is no soft side of me to be worked upon, and that, if you persist in doing what I dislike, you will put it quite out of the question for me to meet you often. That, however, signifies very little. In a few years I shall be out of all this, and our mutual relations will no longer interest either of us. The important thing is that you should not ruin your career in order to gratify a boyish whim. I believe I have made it impossible for you to do this—as impossible, at least, as I care to make it. I have absolutely no fear as to the result; and therefore I can't see any necessity for our going through a scene over it. I wish you would go away, and let me read in peace."

"I will go away in a minute, and I will promise not to make

a scene, governor; only I do wish I could persuade you that I am in earnest," said Claud. "You don't believe in love, I know—"

"Not as a permanent affliction," interpolated Mr. Gervis.

"Well; but the difference between us is that I do. Nothing will prevent my marrying Nina, if she will have me; and, whatever you may say, there is not really any impossibility in living on seven hundred pounds a year. Besides," added Claud hesitatingly, "I think perhaps I may be able to make some small additions to my income."

"Here and there, I suppose," said Mr. Gervis, glancing up, with a faint smile.

Claud reddened slightly. "You know then? You have seen the book? Why did you never say anything about it?"

"You did not honor me with your confidence," replied his father; "and you know it is my rule to avoid intrusion as far as possible."

"I was afraid to tell you; I did not want you to laugh at me. You thought it awful rubbish, of course."

"No; I thought it a very creditable, amateurish sort of performance. I read your verses with a good deal of pleasure, and to be quite frank, I expected that the fact of their simultaneous appearance in two languages would have attracted more notice than it seems to have done. An idle man might fill up his leisure time worse than by composing petty imitations of the minor poets; but your publishers will probably have left you in no doubt as to whether copying deeds for a lawyer is not, upon the whole, a more lucrative employment."

"Versifying is not the only mode of composition that exists," remarked Claud.

"And you think you have a gift for prose? It may be so for aught I know; and I am sure I hope it is. I wish you every success. Remember, however, that in literature, as in all other trades, there is an apprenticeship to be served, and that in the majority of cases it is not a short one. Even such a man as this," continued Mr. Gervis, tapping the cover of *La Peau de Chagrin*, "had to struggle for years against poverty and obscurity before he could force the stupid public to pay him for his work. With the highest respect for you, I see no cause to suppose that you are a second Balzac; and that is one reason why I should advise you not to count upon making a fortune by your pen before you are gray-headed."

"I don't expect to make a fortune at all," Claud declared modestly; "but I may make something. If I can earn a hundred a year to start with, I shall be satisfied."

"And Miss Flemyng? Will she be equally moderate in her wishes, do you think?"

"That is exactly what I am going to ask her."

"Then, for goodness' sake, go. I trust she will find you more entertaining than I have done. *Au plaisir!*"

So the old man went back to his novel, while the young one set forth to play his part in the brief romance of real life; and doubtless each in his heart pitied the other.

CHAPTER XIX.

NINA'S VIEWS.

AT the southernmost extremity of the diminished property belonging to the Moated House, there is a space of artificial water, covering perhaps an area of an acre and a half, which is still dignified by the name of the Lake. Very likely it may have deserved its appellation in bygone years—the gradual outward slope of the hollow in which it lies, and the thick growth of sedge and bulrushes with which its shores are fringed, seem to imply as much—but it has shrunk, even as the domain of those who laid it out has shrunk, and nowadays is only a dismal, muddy pond, suggestive in all its aspects of vicissitude and fallen fortunes. I have seen somewhere an old engraving representing a party of gentlemen in laced coats and knee-breeches assisting ladies in powder and patches and hoops to land upon the little island whose tangled undergrowth has long been the undisputed territory of water-fowl and water-rats. It might be the very punt once occupied by that courtly company which now lies, rotting and filled with water among the rushes of the margin. Traces of winding, moss-grown paths are visible among the trees, beyond which rises the higher ground of the park; and a dilapidated summer-house of Chinese design is dimly reflected in the stagnant water.

It was this rather melancholy spot that Nina had agreed upon with Claud as the scene of their first rendezvous; and here it was that he found her at the appointed time, sitting, clad in a perfectly-made costume of brown with touches of red about it, a small velvet hat trimmed with sable on her head, and a jacket deeply bordered with the same costly fur flung back from her shoulders. She was crunching bonbons in a leisurely, contented way, as she waited, without apparent impatience or anxiety for her lover to show himself—an almost startling embodiment of health, life and beauty amid all that

silence and decay. She must have heard the sound of approaching footsteps long before Claud reached her side, but it was not until he was almost touching her that she turned her head, with a nod and a bright smile, and held up her bag of bonbons.

"Genuine Paris *fondants*," said she, with her mouth full. "Forwarded to me this morning by a wandering admirer. Take one: you can't think how good they are."

Something in the action or the words, or both, jarred upon Claud's sensitive feelings. This was not exactly the sort of welcome that he had been picturing to himself whilst hurrying across country to keep his tryst, and it vexed him to see Nina so light-hearted and careless at a time when his happiness and hers were alike trembling in the balance of fate. But the next instant he took himself to task for his injustice; for how was she to guess what hindrances had been cast in the path of true love that morning? It was now his business to enlighten her; but he thought he might claim a brief space of bliss and forgetfulness before proceeding to the performance of so unromantic a duty; and acting upon this conviction, he found no reason to murmur at the fashion in which his advances were received.

A middle-aged bachelor must really not be expected to describe in detail the meeting of two young lovers. The present writer has reached a period of life at which it is no longer permitted to intrude upon the privacy of youths and maidens, and must leave to the knowledge and imaginations of his readers matters with which his mature and modest pen refuses to deal. I declare that when I take my walks along the Beachborough esplanade on summer nights, and come across some amorous shop-boy seated with his sweetheart upon one of the benches provided by a thoughtful municipality, I avert my head, and hurry past as demurely as if I were Miss Pennefather herself. I am a great deal more anxious to avoid looking at them than they are to escape observation. I would not for the world see their absurd kissings and huggings; and as for listening to the nonsense that they are talking, I would as soon open a letter not addressed to me. For of course what is said in such moments is all nonsense, whether it be uttered by a shop-boy or a duke; and if any one chooses to make a suggestion about sour grapes, I beg to reply that grapes very often are sour, and that young folks frequently make themselves ill by partaking of a fruit from which their elders wisely abstain. Do you want to watch two poor creatures in the humiliating position of mistaking sour for sweet? Do you suppose that at my age I am going to gratify your unhealthy craving with dialogues of the

Strephon and Amaryllis order? No, indeed! If that is what you require, you must address yourself elsewhere. In this staid and respectable history we will have no love-scenes—at least, no more of them than accuracy of narration demands.

With your permission, then, we will drop the curtain over the first quarter of an hour of Claud's interview with his betrothed, and only raise it just in time to catch a few last words of the description characterized above. The lovers, heedless of colds and rheumatics, have established themselves in a corner of the summer-house; his arm is round her waist, her head is comfortably pillowed upon his broad shoulder, and his left hand, is absently twisting and turning the rings upon her slim fingers.

"And are you sure—quite sure—that you never loved any one but me?" whispers the male idiot.

She glances up at him with a queer look in her gray eyes, while an irrepressible smile of amusement breaks out in every line and dimple on her face. "There was a little boy whom I used to meet at the dancing-class when I was eight years old, and who used to spend all his pocket-money in buying sweets for me," she answers gravely. "I think he was the first. Then there were all my brothers' school and college friends—charming fellows, some of them, and devoted to me. And I recollect a Captain Ponsonby, a remarkably good-looking and fascinating man, whom I positively adored for a long time. He has since married another, you will be sorry to hear. That was before I came out. Since then, I must have had at least half a dozen strong fancies and three or four serious attachments."

"Oh, Nina!"

"Well, you asked me, you know; and what could I do but tell you the melancholy truth?"

Claud sighs profoundly; but apparently forms a magnanimous resolution to let the dead past bury its dead. "At least," says he, "you will never love anybody but me again."

"Ah, that is assuming a great deal," answers the girl. But looking up at her adorer's lugubrious visage, her humor changes suddenly, and she throws her arms round his neck. "No, no! don't look so sad. It was all untrue, what I told you just now; I only said it to tease you. I never cared a straw for a single one of those stupid people; and I love you a great, great deal—more than you love me, I dare say. Now are you contented?"

"Contented!" Claud could not find words to describe his beatitude, and was compelled to have recourse to other modes of expression.

"And will nothing make you change?"

"Nothing on earth."

"And what you said yesterday—"

"Never mind what I said yesterday. To-day is to-day; let us take it, and be thankful for it."

"Yes; to-day is to-day," says Claud, recalled on a sudden to the remembrance of his duty; "and we must take it as we find it. Nina, darling, something happened to-day that I must tell you about."

"Something disagreeable?"

"I am afraid it is rather disagreeable. You know I had to face the governor this morning."

"And he threatened to cut you off with a shilling if you married me, didn't he?"

"No; it was not quite so bad as that; but—"

"I know what is coming. Oh, Claud, don't let us have a long engagement! I would far rather part at once and have done with it. I don't think you at all understand what I am, though I have told you often enough, and no doubt there have been plenty of people so kind as to let you hear about all my flirtations. If I were your wife it would be different; but so long as I have to live as I am doing now I must amuse myself, and I must flirt. I can't help it; it is my nature to be so. And you would be jealous; and there would be quarrels, and explanations, and then more quarrels; and it is easy to see how all that would end. Whatever we do, let us spare ourselves the miserable humiliation of being put upon our trial and breaking down."

The girl spoke with a vehemence which, to Claud's mind, was hardly called for by the occasion. In this first moment of his triumph, the tendency of which Nina had accused herself seemed to him no very heinous offense. He was even disposed to include it in the list of her irresistible charms, and to look with a very lenient eye upon those prospective worshipers whom it might attract. Poor vain creatures, flattering themselves with the hope of gaining a prize above their reach! Might not he who had secured it afford to smile at their fatuity?

"My darling," said he, "I don't think I should ever be jealous of you, or mind what you did, so long as you loved me. But whether our engagement is to be a long or a short one rests only with you. We may be married now, at once, if—if only you are not afraid of marrying a poor man. The governor, you see, is dead against my marrying at all. His own second marriage, somehow or other, hasn't turned out a success; and so he has got it into his head that everybody else

must be equally unfortunate. He told me plainly that he would prevent this if he could; and I made so bold as to answer that I didn't think he would be able to prevent it. But he hasn't behaved badly, all things considered. He hasn't threatened to stop the supplies out and out, as he might have done. What he did was to promise me a small independence, enough for a bachelor; but not enough, as he thinks, for a married man. I must say that I think he owed it me to do as much; still, nothing forced him to do it; and, under the circumstances, it was a generous offer. He said he was quite convinced that you would send me about my business as soon as you heard what a pauper I was; and I replied that I was quite convinced that you would do nothing of the sort. I wonder which of us was right!"

It was clearly unreasonable to expect Miss Flemyng to decide between the father and the son in the absence of more specific information. She raised her eyes, with a rather troubled expression, to her lover's, saying, "Well?"

"Well; it is seven hundred a year—not a penny more."

"Seven hundred a year!" repeated Nina, incredulously.

Claud's heart died within him. He made a gesture of assent, being unable to speak.

"Do you mean to say that Mr. Gervis thought he was going to scare us into parting by such a threat as that? He can't have been serious. Why, seven hundred a year, properly managed, is positive wealth. Why in the world shouldn't we marry upon it?"

She was so confident that Claud, after a brief interlude of ecstasy, thought it his duty to descend to details.

"Do you think you realize the self-denial that such an income implies?" he asked. "Take the item of dress alone. Why, this thing"—stroking her dark sables gently—"must have cost more than the whole annual allowance I shall be able to give you, my poor child."

"Oh, but it isn't paid for," answered Nina, placidly.

This was hardly the sort of argument to reassure a prudent economist. "It will have to be paid for, though," he submitted, with a shade of anxiety in his tone.

"Oh, yes; some day. I don't let my tradesmen bother me. I have never been out of debt since I can remember; and I don't see why one ever need be. What is the use of dealing with people who charge credit prices, if one has to pay ready money? I give them something on account when I can, and so it goes on. Don't look so solemn. I mean to be a model of parsimony after we are married, and you need not be afraid of our ending in the workhouse. I could point out to you

heaps and heaps of people in Beachborough who haven't any more to live upon than we shall have; and besides, you know, Claud, it is not as if these few hundreds were all we had to look forward to for the rest of our lives."

"We must not expect another sixpence during the governor's lifetime," said Claud quickly. "He warned me of that; and he never goes back from his word."

Nina smiled. "That is a *façon de parler*," she observed. "Everybody and everything changes in this world. But, let him be as obstinate as he will, a time must come when you will be better off than you are now. I don't want to shock you, and I'm sure I hope Mr. Gervis may have many years of life before him; still the fact remains that you will probably survive him."

"He is perfectly free to disinherit me, though; and it is quite on the cards that he may do it, if I act in opposition to his wishes."

"He shall not do that," said Nina with determination. "He dislikes me, I know."

Claud murmured a faint protest.

"Oh, you need not trouble to contradict me. I discovered his sentiments with regard to me long ago, and I gave up trying to please him, because it was not worth while, and I did not care whether he was pleased or not. But I care now; and I intend that he shall like me. I assure you I can be very fascinating when I give my mind to it."

Claud had no doubt whatever of that. At the same time, he could not help remembering that Varinka was generally held to be among the most fascinating of women.

"You don't know the governor," he remarked. "He is not a bit like anybody else. I would much rather look forward to making a moderate competency by my pen."

"So you will, of course. You are going to be a great man, and I shall be ridiculously proud of you. There really is not the slightest fear of our starving. Now suppose we say no more about money. It is a horrid, vulgar subject, and I hate it, don't you?"

After that, Claud could hardly persist in his discussion of ways and means. It was, to be sure, a vulgar subject, and he was not unwilling to change it for a pleasanter one.

The moments passed quickly for this happy pair, as they sat in their tumble-down retreat, exchanging those promises and assurances which are as old as the world, and which may very probably have been listened to by many a departed lover in that self-same spot. The wind, rising in gusts, brought down showers of yellow leaves all around them, the gloom of

a gray afternoon deepened into twilight, and a chilly mist hung over the lake; but their bodies seemed to have borrowed from their spirits a temporary imperviousness to damp, and they were too much engrossed in one another to notice whether external objects wore a cheerful aspect or otherwise. They spoke of the merry, independent life they would lead together, and agreed that Paris should be their home—Paris being so economical a place of residence, and offering, besides, such exceptional advantages both to literary men and to ladies of limited means who would fain catch some occasional glimpses of the gay world. Small income life in London, as Nina pointed out, meant neither more nor less than social death; whereas, in the French capital, where distances were not so great and money was less abundant, one could rent a pretty little flat, with a southern aspect, for next to nothing, one could receive one's friends from time to time without spending a fortune on entertaining them, and pass an evening at the *Français* or the *Odéon* for the really nominal price of seven or eight francs a head. Some such mode of existence as was thus vaguely shadowed forth would, she declared, satisfy her utmost aspirations. She didn't want anything more; indeed, when she came to think of it, she was by no means sure that it would not be much better fun to be poor than rich. She was sick to death of English dullness and routine, and longed to make a fresh start under sunnier skies and in brighter circles. Once, when the rumbling of carriage-wheels was heard on the distant drive, she exclaimed gleefully—

"There go some visitors! How thankful I am that I have not got to see them! How thankful I shall be when I know that I need *never* see them again, unless I like! Oh, the joy of saying good-by to them!—to them, and their tittle-tattle, and their patronage, and their stale news, and their clothing-clubs, and their dreadful assembly-room dances! You don't understand; because you are a man, and can choose your own friends, and be rude or surly even to them when you happen to be out of humor; but we women must be civil *quand même*, and I can assure you that the amount of suffering we inflict upon one another, and bear stoically, is something almost beyond belief. We won't know any ill-natured old frumps when we are married, will we?" Then, after some time had elapsed, and there was no sound of the carriage returning towards the lodge, she laughed, and exclaimed—"Poor things! I know what has happened to them. Papa has caught them just as they were handing out their cards, and at this moment they are being marched across the damp grass in their thin boots to look at the chrysanthemums. Can't you imagine them curs-

ing and swearing in their hearts, with their faces screwed up into sickly smiles, and ejaculating 'Oh, how *too* lovely! I *do* envy you your garden, Mr. Flemyng! I had no idea chrysanthemums could be so beautiful'—and all the rest of it? Only, you know, that is merely their kindness and politeness; because they had to look at those same plants last year and the year before, and they will have to look at them next year, if they don't die in the mean time. Papa is in his glory, and thinks he is giving them a real treat. Poor papa! do you remember how angry he was about his dahlias, and how shamefully you behaved in letting that good-for-nothing young Burvill off? I taxed him with his sins the next time I saw him on the beach, and he made use of such language that I fled discomfited. What made you let him off, Claud? I believe he threatened to thrash you unless you did."

Claud laughed. He recollected perfectly the substance of his conversation with Tom Burvill on that memorable evening, and was not over-anxious to be cross-questioned upon the subject. "Talking of your father," he remarked, "I suppose I shall have to go through a formal conference with him before long, shall I not? Fathers are rather a bore sometimes, I must confess. What will he say to a pauper son-in-law do you think?"

"Nothing but what is amiable, unless you put it into his head to raise objections. He has not the most remote idea of the value of money, poor old fellow, and if you were to tell him that you could keep a carriage and a couple of saddle-horses on seven hundred a year, I haven't a doubt but that he would believe you. Your best plan would be to take his consent for granted, and to rather imply that the whole affair was his arranging and that he ought to be very much obliged to you for forwarding his designs."

Claud said he would do his best to carry out this suggestion. He was not, in truth, much afraid of Mr. Flemyng; but a sense of the awkwardness of coupling his formal demand with the admission that he had but a bare sufficiency of means to offer, and that his father was strongly opposed to his marriage, made him anxious to get this bad quarter of an hour over and done with as soon as possible. He confessed as much to Nina, who shrugged her shoulders sympathetically.

"It *is* a nuisance," she agreed; "I wish I could do the business for you. But never mind; it won't last long; and I think I can almost promise you that he will consent without hesitation. The fact is it will be an immense relief to him in many ways to get rid of me."

The sequel, however, showed that Miss Flemyng set too

modest a value upon herself, and that her father was by no means so eager to part with her as she had supposed. An hour later Claud was admitted into that gentleman's study, and, instead of being met with the affectionate greeting which his experience during the last few weeks had entitled him to look for, was requested in grave accents to take a chair, and informed that the honor of his visit had been anticipated.

"I am acquainted with the errand which has brought you here," Mr. Flemyng began; "and I am glad that you have seen fit to address yourself to me without loss of time. Under the circumstances, that was the proper course to adopt, and it enables me to say what otherwise I could hardly have said without some appearance of indelicacy: namely, that I must decline for some time to come to receive you in my house as I have had the pleasure of doing of late."

The philosopher had taken up a commanding position upon the hearthrug. His cheeks were slightly flushed, and his features bore traces of some recent agitation, ill-concealed under an additional loftiness of mien. Disappointment and mortified vanity might have been plainly read there by any dispassionate observer; but Claud was too pre-occupied with his own affairs to take a calm survey of his host, and saw only that the man was angry. He made an attempt to speak, but was silenced by an imperative gesture.

"Allow me, if you please, a few minutes. When I tell you that I have just parted from your father, who has been with me during the greater part of the afternoon, you will no doubt understand the situation—I may add the embarrassing and unexpected situation—in which I find myself placed."

Claud's face lengthened, and a subdued whistle escaped from his lips. "So it was the governor's carriage-wheels that we heard," thought he. "He has stolen a march upon me. What a fool I was not to remember the importance of being the first to tickle this solemn old donkey's long ears!"

"What I have heard to-day," continued Mr. Flemyng, all unconscious of the disrespectful reflections that were passing through his would-be son-in-law's mind, "has greatly surprised me. I do not refer to the news of your attachment to my daughter—for you are not to suppose that what has been going on for many weeks past has escaped my observation—but to your father's strongly-expressed opposition to your marriage, and to the means which he has taken to render it impossible. I say advisedly 'impossible;' for upon that point my conviction is as firm and as unalterable as Mr. Gervis's. Whether due consideration has been shown to myself and my daughter in the matter is a question which I do not care to

discuss. I hold a very decided opinion that I ought to have been warned of your father's peculiar views with reference to matrimony; Mr. Gervis, on the contrary, appears to think that it was my part to inform myself of them. As to that we must be content to remain at issue. Mr. Gervis, I am bound to say, has expressed himself with a great deal of courtesy and proper feeling; and there has been nothing in the shape of a breach between us. We are, in short, both men of the world, he and I," observed Mr. Flemyng, with a complacent roll of his head; "which is equivalent to saying that we are able to retain our self-command under every circumstance. I have only to add my hope that the friendly relations which have sprung up between you and my family may not be put an end to by this —untoward event; although, as I hinted to you just now, it may be advisable that they should suffer some temporary interruption."

"I think I shall be able to convince you, Mr. Flemyng," said Claud, "that they need not be interrupted at all, and that we may substitute relationship for friendly relations before long."

"Pardon me, my dear young friend; you will not be able to convince me of anything of the sort. Let us examine the facts as men of the world and men of common sense. We find ourselves at once in the presence of an insurmountable obstacle—insufficiency of income. Insufficiency of income present and future; for Mr. Gervis gave me distinctly to understand that you would not necessarily be heir even to a portion of his estate. Now I dare say," continued Mr. Flemyng benevolently, "that you, being young, view this subject in a different light from that in which reason obliges me to regard it. Your father has, in fact, prepared me to find you a little vague in your notions of finance. All the more necessary is it that I should use such poor powers as I possess to make your situation clear to you. Many persons in my place would content themselves with simply declining to entertain your proposal; but I take an interest in your welfare, I have a sincere friendship for you, and I should like to feel that I had done what in me lay towards opening your eyes to the complicated conditions of existence in the world which we inhabit."

"You would like to hear yourself talk, you mean," thought Claud; but he bowed, without speaking, and bided his time patiently.

Then Mr. Flemyng cleared his voice, and embarked upon a dissertation which lasted for twenty minutes, from start to finish, without a check. Claud, giving an account of the interview in later years, declared that this dreadful old man traced the history of marriage from its origin in the garden of Eden down to

the present day, glancing briefly at the facility of maintaining a large family in the time of the patriarchs, stating, in a parenthesis, some excellent reasons for the incompatibility of polygamy with a high state of civilization, alluding to the laws and customs relating to matrimony which prevailed at Athens and Sparta, distinguishing between the Roman *materfamilias* and *uxor*, passing lightly over the invasion of the barbarians to the rise and decay of the feudal system and the state of domestic institutions under the Renaissance, devoting a few sentences to the Reformation, to Puritanism and to the subsequent laxity of morals characteristic of the latter part of the seventeenth and the whole of the eighteenth centuries, and so, after a compendious survey of the influence of the revolutionary era upon society, reaching his conclusion that seven hundred a year was not enough to support a middle-class couple in the reign of Queen Victoria. The recipient of all this stored-up wisdom confessed that his attention wandered a good deal during its delivery, and that he was entirely at a loss to make any reply to the orator until a passing observation of Mr. Flemyng's to the effect that Nina's husband must not look for anything in the shape of settlements afforded him the opportunity of striking in with—

"My dear sir, I assure you I never dreamt of such a thing. The fact is that, with care, we shall be able to live perfectly well upon what we have, and neither of us expects or asks for more."

Mr. Flemyng wagged his head, and smiled with compassionate superiority. "Have you gone into this matter?" he asked. "Have you any idea of the purchasing power of money, or of the cost of the necessaries of life?"

"I know that lots of people marry upon less than seven hundred a year," answered Claud.

"Unquestionably. But what will enable A. to live in comfort may be found wholly inadequate to the wants of B., and in judging of the means requisite to support two given persons, we have to take into consideration the surroundings to which those two persons have been accustomed. And in this connection I may remind you that even the law has held a husband liable for such articles as jewelry supplied to his wife, under the head of necessaries."

"I thought that depended upon the husband's income," said Claud.

"I am not contemplating the probable result of an action brought against you by your wife's creditors; my allusion was merely intended to show the elasticity of the word 'necessaries,' and to point out the prudence of discovering what mean-

ing any lady may attach to that word before leading her to the altar. Now I happen to be in possession of certain data which may assist us in forming a definite judgment in the present instance. I hold in my hand,"—here Mr. Flemyng dived into his coat-tail pocket, produced from thence a sheaf of papers, and fixing his double eye-glasses on his nose, proceeded:—"I hold in my hands sundry documents, which, to my mind, contain evidence of an absolutely convincing nature. They are—not to waste more words upon it—bills. Bills from milliners, dressmakers, bootmakers, and other tradesmen, which have been sent in to me at various times during the last few years, and which—which, in short, I have had to pay," concluded Mr. Flemyng, pulling a rather wry face. "Since your father left me," he resumed, "I have been going into these figures a little; and although, owing to the irregularity with which the bills have been furnished, and to the circumstance that every one of them begins with the item 'Account rendered,' I have found it difficult to form a strictly accurate estimate of my daughter's annual expenditure, I have calculated that it cannot be set down at a lower figure than two hundred and fifty pounds."

Mr. Flemyng looked over his glasses at Claud to see what effect had been produced by this alarming statement; but as the young man only smiled slightly, he returned to the contemplation of a memorandum to which he had already referred. "Now," said he, briskly, "let us endeavor to make a rough summary of your needs and hers and compare it with the means at your disposal. Two hundred and fifty pounds we have accounted for. Your own allowance for dress, tobacco, and so on I should put at—"

"Fifty pounds a year," said Claud with decision.

"A hundred and fifty at the very least. House-rent, with rates and taxes, another hundred and fifty—certainly not too high a figure. Wages for three servants, sixty pounds; doctor's bill, journeys, and other incidental expenses, say a hundred and fifty pounds again. Now, taking your income, together with the hundred a year which I propose to allow to Nina when she marries, at eight hundred, you will find, after adding up these items, that there will remain to you exactly forty pounds per annum upon which to defray the cost of food, wine, lighting, and coals. *Quod est absurdum.*"

Mr. Flemyng thrust the papers back into his pocket, and rubbed his hands with a certain quiet triumph. "Nothing so convincing as figures," he observed.

"I have heard it said that there is nothing so misleading," replied Claud. "But at any rate your conclusions must be worthless, because you start from false premises. Because we

have spent a good deal of money in the past, it does not at all follow that we must needs do so in the future. One cuts one's coat according to one's cloth. I don't pretend to have studied details as yet; but I think I could easily make a rough calculation of our expenditure which would be quite as trustworthy as yours. For instance, one ought to be able to get a very good little house for a rent of fifty pounds. Well, let us say, rent, rates, and taxes, seventy; dress, a hundred; wages, fifty; doctor, twenty; household expenses, at five pounds a week, two hundred and sixty; total five hundred. That leaves us with a margin of three hundred for contingencies."

It is needless to follow the course of the dispute which ensued between the two economists. The one knew as much of his subject as the other; so that in one sense they started upon tolerably even terms; but it is easier to defend than to attack a position, and this told against Claud. Moreover, the fruits of Mr. Gervis's visit became apparent in more ways than one; and when the argument died away from sheer lack of material to keep it going, our young friend found that he had gained no advantage, save that of having restored his opponent to good humor. For Mr. Flemyng, who loved a discussion above all things, had almost forgotten his wrongs in the pleasure of displaying his stock of varied knowledge, and when he shook hands with Claud, and bade him good-by, went so far as to express a hope that they might meet again soon.

"May I understand, then, that you do not forbid me your house?" inquired the latter.

Mr. Flemyng, with some warmth, declared himself incapable of such discourtesy.

"And may I see Miss Flemyng as usual?"

"Ah—well—h'm! I hardly know what to say to that. In the presence of a third person—yes."

"But, my dear Mr. Flemyng, you cannot refuse me one last meeting with her. I will not ask for more."

"Be it so. Remember, however, only one. I am not sure that I am wise—"

But Claud cut him short with a profusion of thanks, and escaped adroitly before his host had time to retract this unwilling concession. And as he walked back towards Southlands in the dark, he said to himself that if Nina would but remain true to him, neither her father nor his should keep them long asunder.

CHAPTER XX.

PERVERSITY.

CLAUD took his place at the dinner-table that night with the consciousness of a novel sensation of embarrassment. All the summer through, he had come and gone as the fancy had happened to take him, living almost as much at the Moated House as at Southlands, rendering no account of his actions in the home circle, and not concerning himself at all with the opinions which might have been formed upon them there. Nina Flemyng alone had occupied his thoughts, to the exclusion of all less important subjects. But now for the first time —why or wherefore signifies little—he was beginning to emerge somewhat from his self-engrossment, and an uneasy conviction forced itself upon him that he was thought to have made a fool of himself. He suspected, too, that the occurrences of the day were no secret either to Geneviève or to Miss Potts. The former, he noticed, was very silent and looked sad, while the countenance of the latter wore an expression of almost ludicrous concern. No one could have told them all that had happened since the morning; but these domestic events have a mysterious way of making themselves felt, and it seemed to Claud that everybody knew all about it. He could not help fancying that even the servants glanced at him, every now and again, with an air of slightly derisive commiseration.

All this was trivial enough as regarded its influence upon his future line of conduct; but it made him uncomfortable at the time, and served to increase the general feeling of constraint. It is true that Mr. Gervis's customary placidity showed no signs of disturbance; but Mr. Gervis could do little towards setting any member of his household at ease without Claud's aid, and probably the two ladies were not sorry to seize the first opportunity of effecting their escape.

Our hero hardly knew what to do or say on finding himself alone once more with his father. Should he make any allusion to the topic of which both of them must needs be thinking? Ought he to announce the news of Nina's constancy and the discouraging issue of his appeal to Mr. Flemyng, and to reiterate his determination to have his own way, in spite of all opposition? Or would it be wiser to remain quiescent, and allow the enemy to fire the first shot, should he be so minded? The *Pall Mall Gazette*, which was brought in at this moment with the coffee, relieved him from embarrassment. Mr. Ger-

vis took up the paper, lighted a cigarette, and began to read out the latest intelligence bearing upon the Eastern question, interspersing these extracts with occasional laconic comments of his own. He observed that the establishment of a Greek empire at Constantinople would have to be the ultimate solution of the problem; he gave his impressions of the Hellenic character, grounded upon an official residence of some years' duration at Athens, related an anecdote or two of the late King Otho, and remarked upon the various difficulties which seemed likely to disturb the peace of Europe for a considerable period yet to come. All this in his usual languid accents, and without apparent pre-occupation on the score of difficulties nearer home. After a time, he turned to the leading article and relapsed into silence; and Claud, having finished his coffee, rose, and left the room.

Southlands is a house rather overdone with what the house-agents call "noble reception-rooms." There are too many of them for the requirements of a small party of inmates; they are too large to be kept warm by means of open fireplaces, and there are no hot-water pipes in the house—or, at least, were none when its present owner came into possession of it. At this time neither he nor any of his family made use of the drawing-room—a vast and cheerless apartment in which the gaudy upholstery of thirty years ago still survived intact—but chose in preference to sit in the library, where there was less of pretension and more of home-like comfort. Thither Claud betook himself, and finding it unoccupied, drew a chair up to the fire, and taking a volume of Goethe which he found lying open on the table, tried to forget his sorrows for a time in perusing those of Werther. He soon, however, became aware that this would not do. He was not in the humor for reading, and the crabbed text and involved German construction irritated him. He tossed Goethe impatiently aside, and after wandering about the room for a while, examining the bookcases, and wondering aloud what the deuce Gen and Miss Potts were doing with themselves, decided at last to go in search of those ladies.

Once in the hall, a far-away echo of music gave him a clew to their whereabouts. He followed the sound, and passed into a long corridor hung with paintings, at the end of which, shut off by a heavy curtain, was an octagon room, built by old Colonel Gervis for the reception of a marble group of Diana and Actæon which he had bought in Italy as a genuine piece of ancient sculpture, and had transported to England at an enormous outlay. Competent authorities having subsequently cast some doubt upon the authenticity of this work of art, the

old gentleman, in a fit of passion, had ordered his costly purchase to be broken up into fragments and carted away out of sight. The pedestal which had supported it remained, and was found useful as a support for her music-stand by Geneviève, who had appropriated the little octagon room for practicing purposes, as being remote from the rest of the house and beyond the range of fastidious ears.

Claud groped his way along the dark gallery towards the streak of light which escaped from beneath the curtain at the end of it. A most singular and confused medley of sound rushed out to meet him as he advanced—a quick succession of running passages, breaking into chords, jostled by sharp dissonances—a hurly-burly in the midst of which a few bars of some well-known composition emerged here and there, like straws upon the surface of a torrent, and lost themselves again. It was as if the unseen violinist had raised some harmonious imp to assist her in her art—as Tartini once invoked the devil, they say—and was playing in obedience to a will other than her own, vainly struggling to eliminate from this whirlwind of sound germs of some fit utterance for her thoughts. But on a sudden chaos took shape; the capricious strokes of the bow ceased, and there rang out clearly and firmly into the stillness the first notes of an air which Claud knew well. It was a marching song, composed in honor of Pio Nono, the liberal pope, by I know not what enthusiastic Roman, and frequently chanted by a sanguine people during those brief halcyon days of 1847 when the dream of an Italian Italy had seemed on the verge of fulfillment. Geneviève and her brother had heard the chorus sung scores of times in Paris, where the Princess Ouranoff's doors were ever open to exiles of all nationalities. Probably it had maintained its place in the hearts and on the lips of some of those gentlemen less on account of the sentiments it breathed—which, indeed, have been somewhat discredited by later developments of history—than by reason of its triumphant, jubilant melody—a true song of liberty, irrepressible as the carol of a skylark, wild as the free winds that sweep the Alban hills, and soft as the fathomless blue above them. But surely never before had voice or instrument lent that stirring strain such meaning as it borrowed now from Geneviève's violin. The measured chords started with a swelling *crescendo*, melted into subdued ecstasy, and gathering volume, rolled onwards like the sound of many waters, rising, falling, filling the air with a hundred sweet vibrations and cadences, and striking the listener in the darkness outside with a sort of pleased amazement.

"Something must have made her very happy, that she

can play like that," was the comment that came into his mind.

He had been standing close to the curtain for some minutes: he put it gently aside now, and peeped in. The little bare room was lighted only by the candles on the music-stand; the two women had their backs turned to him. Geneviève was standing upright, a long cloak thrown back from her shoulders; Miss Potts seated beside her on a low camp-chair, was swaying to and fro in a kind of decorous rapture infinitely ludicrous to behold. Her head, her hands, and her feet marked time noiselessly; her long ringlets swung from side to side; her profile flung the strangest and most grotesque shadows upon the white wall. It was hard upon the poor lady that Nature should have made her capable of enthusiasm and denied to her person that grace which enthusiasm can only augment; but as she could not guess that anybody was looking at her, her enjoyment, let us hope, was not marred by any consciousness of her physical deficiencies.

"Go on, my child, go on," she entreated, when at length the strains, growing softer and softer, died away, as though the last marchers in some triumphal procession had filed past; "you transport me to paradise!" And Geneviève without a word, drew her bow across the strings once more.

Again that strange, harmonious jumble arose—fragments of symphonies, echoes of waltzes, mazes of sound without name or form, while Miss Potts, a little puzzled in her efforts to keep time to a timeless measure, performed a kind of voluntary St. Vitus's dance. A queer performance and a queer couple.

Claud watched them with increasing curiosity. Presently a light touch on his arm made him start violently. It was his father who stood beside him, his finger on his lips. Claud moved silently to one side, and the older man peered through the aperture. Thus for ten minutes or more the fantastic solo went on before an augmented audience. Finally Geneviève let her violin drop from her shoulder, exclaiming—

"There! that is enough. We will go back to the library now. Miss Potts, you must be frozen to death."

"Oh no, indeed I am not," cried Miss Potts; "I am quite hot. They will not miss us, and it is not nearly bedtime yet. Please don't stop."

But Mr. Gervis let the curtain fall, and stole away, signing to his son to follow him; and the two listeners effected their retreat unheard.

Mr. Gervis led the way to the billiard-room, which was always lighted at night, though seldom used, and taking down a cue from the rack, "Are you inclined for a game?" he asked.

Claud said, "Yes, if you are."

"Light your cigar then, and I will see what I can do with you. You must allow me something; I have not played a game of billiards for years. I will take ten points."

Mr. Gervis made no allusion to the scene they had just witnessed until several additions had been made to his score. Then he paused, in the act of delivering a stroke, and looking up, said abruptly—

"Well, what does all that say to you?"

"Geneviève's playing, do you mean? I don't know, I'm sure. I have never heard her play like that before. It is extraordinary—it is a great power. It shows that she must have practiced a great deal more than we supposed."

"Oh, that is what it shows you? It showed me a little more, I fancy. For one thing, that the girl has, what you, saving your presence, have not—genius."

"I am delighted to hear you say so," cried Claud magnanimously. "As for me, I never pretended to genius, nor imagined for a moment that I had any."

"Oh, you are clever," said Gervis, nodding at him; "you have a very pretty talent. The world may hear of you some day;—but then again it may not. That girl, if she had to earn her own living, would become famous. Her performance was absurd; it was not violin-playing; it was not music, properly speaking. But there was genius in every note of it. And there was something else, plain enough to me, but not to you, I suppose—perversity. She will give trouble to herself and her friends, I suspect, if she lives long enough. For the rest, you may have already discovered, without musical aid, that your sister is a perverse person."

"I don't know that I should have called her that," said Claud meditatively. "Prejudiced, perhaps."

"Especially as regards a certain individual who shall be nameless, eh? Let us not blame her on that account; you know, there are so many people who share her opinion. I was saying that she is a perverse genius. Odd, that she should be anything of the kind! I can't tell where she got her temperament from. Not from me certainly, for if ever there was a humdrum, unremarkable family, we Gervises belong to it. It is the Italian strain of blood, I suppose, which is an old one, and must have picked up all kinds of stray ingredients in the process of its development. Your mother was assuredly no genius; but, on the other hand, she was well provided with—some other qualities which I can detect in your sister. Upon my word, when I think of what the vices of her family were, and compare them with certain of my own little hereditary

failings, I feel that I owe you both a sincere apology for having married her. And I really believe," continued Mr. Gervis, moving away from the table, and seating himself upon an adjacent sofa, "that if people realized the discomfort they were bringing upon unborn generations by injudicious cross-breeding, three-fourths of the population would become so deucedly cautious and timorous that they would live and die single. Which would be an excellent thing in every way. Let me recommend the subject to your consideration."

"Governor," said Claud, abruptly and somewhat irrelevantly, "what made you go over and set old Flemyng against me this afternoon?"

"My dear fellow, what an absurd question! Did I not tell you—mark that miss up to me, please—did I not tell you that I meant to use every reasonable means of preventing you from spoiling your career? I counted, and count still, upon the young lady's good sense; but it seemed as well to make assurance doubly sure by frightening the father. You ought, of course, to have secured his ear before me. Why didn't you?"

"I never thought of it," answered Claud, innocently. "But you were wrong about Nina. She laughed at the idea of our being too poor to marry."

"Did she indeed? In that case, I have the consolation of knowing that I did not spend a very wearisome afternoon to no purpose. There is also room for disinterested satisfaction in the thought that, some day or other, you will be thankful to me for the trouble I have taken. Another miss!—and look what you have left me! This ought to be final."

"That makes you game, governor," said Claud, as Mr. Gervis, after putting down the red twice in succession, scored a rather clever five stroke.

"One can win most games," observed his father serenely, "if one keeps cool, and does not care at all whether one wins or loses."

"It is a better plan still to be determined to win," thought Claud, following his late antagonist out of the room. It was not yet quite clear to him by what means he should get the better of that unimpassioned player as regarded the more important contest in which they were engaged; but that he should eventually do so he had no doubt, and this, he felt, was half the battle. He revolved many inchoate projects in his mind before going to sleep that night, but adjourned further consideration of them all until such time as he should have held a consultation with Nina, to whose mother-wit and fertility of resource he trusted more than to his own.

That this confidence was not misplaced he had ample proof on the following morning, when he betook himself to the Moated House to claim that last private interview which Mr. Flemyng's good nature had conceded. Nina, so far from being cast down by her father's unforeseen hostility, was in one of her brightest moods, and professed herself quite confident of being able to out-general the allied forces. Nothing could be clearer or more business-like than her review of the situation.

"Mr. Gervis we may look upon as disposed of," said she. "That is, if you are quite certain that he will not stop your allowance under any circumstances."

"Yes, I am quite certain of that," answered Claud.

"Very well, then; *he* can't prevent our marrying. Papa, of course, can—at least, he can make it practically impossible for us to be married from this house in the orthodox way. But his power begins and ends there. All that we have to do is to be true to one another; and then, after a little bother—you don't mind a little bother, do you?"

It is superfluous to put Claud's reply on record.

"Well, it will not be very great, nor last very long. I have been thinking it all over, and I have come to the conclusion that the only thing to be done is to make a clean bolt for it, and confront our revered parents with an accomplished fact."

"What! run away?" ejaculated Claud, not a little startled by the suddenness of the proposition.

Nina threw herself back in her chair, and laughed with much apparent enjoyment. "How rude you are!" she cried. "Wasn't it enough to throw the burden upon me of making a suggestion which really ought to have come from you; or are you going to cover me with humiliation by raising objections to my plan?"

"How can you say such things? You took my breath away a little, that was all. I expected—"

"What? That I should advise you to go away and travel for five years, promising to remain in strict seclusion in the mean time, upon the chance of your majesty's continuing constant? Or that I should recommend our addresing *trois sommations respectueuses* to our cruel parents, as they do in France, and getting our own way at last by dint of sheer pertinacity? I couldn't attempt to face all the worry and opposition that that implies. I should break down before a month was out. What I told you yesterday was only too true; there's no stability about me. Oh, Claud, I am not nearly good enough for you; and if you were not infatuated, you would see it. Anyhow, being what I am, I must be taken

now or not at all—middle courses won't do. An elopement or a final parting, which is it to be? I know which you will choose if you are wise."

Wisely or unwisely, Claud's choice was soon made. He was full of happiness and gratitude, and quite prepared to concur in any scheme which Nina might advocate. "Only wouldn't it be better, before we decide on doing anything, to make one more attempt at talking Mr. Flemyng over?"

Nina shook her head. "I have been talking to him the whole morning," she said, "and it has been all wasted breath. Mr. Gervis seems to have scared him by some means or other, and he won't listen to reason. After all, a runaway match will be rather fun in some ways," she added musingly. "All I shall regret will be the having no trousseau; wedding presents I can forego without a pang. I am one of those unfortunates who have an enormous acquaintance, and not one good, solid, old-fashioned friend who might be counted upon to come down with a grand piano or a check for a hundred pounds; and you know the sort of frightful things people give one nowadays—horrid, cheap ink-stands and monstrosities in modern china, and all kinds of abominations in imitation oxydized silver—it is a positive relief to think that one's house will not be choked up with all that trash. My trousseau I confess that I do grieve over; but I suppose the best way will be for me to order the few rags I shall want afterwards, and if papa has a spark of proper feeling, he will insist upon paying the bills."

Claud was too happy to be alarmed at the ominous vista which this incidental hint might have revealed to more experienced eyes. In Nina's willingness to dispense with those accompaniments of the marriage ceremony which are supposed to be especially dear to women he saw a proof, not only of her superiority to the rest of her sex, but of her truly disinterested love for him; and he felt, and said, that he could never be sufficiently thankful to her, or cease to wonder at his good fortune.

His attention, indeed, was so fully engaged with asseverations of this description, and with the answers and rejoinders that naturally flowed from them, that very nearly an hour slipped away before he began to think of arranging the details of the proposed flight. Then it was that he recollected, with a shock of dismay, that the days of Gretna Green were over. "Good Heavens! what shall we do?" he exclaimed. "I am almost sure that we can't be married anywhere, unless our banns have been called in church and we have resided for a certain number of weeks in the parish. Did you think about that?"

Nina confessed that this necessity, if it existed, had escaped her memory. Upon reflection, she believed that there was some stupid rule of the kind. Yes; no doubt that would explain why one never heard of people running away now—except, of course, married people. How too tiresome! But wasn't there such a thing as a special license? Or had a vexatious legislature done away with that convenience too? Luckily the room in which this plot was hatching happened to adjoin Mr. Flemyng's study, whither a move was now made with the view of consulting the laws of the land as to matrimony. *Stephen's Commentaries* was dragged from its shelf and the chapter relating to marriage duly referred to. Owing, however, partly to a nervous dread of Mr. Flemyng's sudden entrance and partly to the provoking diffuseness of the learned Blackstone and his commentators, the whole subject appeared to our conspirators to be involved in some obscurity; the one thing manifest being that nobody could very well get married in England without a considerable amount of dangerous publicity. Under these circumstances, Nina, who had no idea of allowing a pack of pedantic lawyers to frustrate her designs, was of opinion that some foreign country might offer greater facilities—at all events as regarded secrecy—than the United Kingdom.

"I'll tell you what you must do," said she, as soon as she and her lover were safely seated by the fireside once more; "you must run over to Port Ste. Marie in the yacht, and see the consul there. You can find out all particulars from him, without anybody knowing anything about it; and if it turns out that our names have to be stuck up in his office for a week, it won't much matter. At least it would be an extraordinary piece of bad luck if anybody who knew us happened to see them there. Yes; of course that will be much the best way; I wonder I did not think of it before. I know there is an English clergyman at Port Ste. Marie; and it will be ever so much jollier to be married in France, won't it? We can go straight to Paris, and look out for rooms at once. What fun it will all be!"

This last ejaculation really seemed to convey the impression that was uppermost in her mind. She was lying back in her low chair, fanning herself lazily with a fire-screen, and discussing an elopement from her father's house with no more apparent anxiety than if it had been a picnic that she was organizing. Claud could not help wishing that she were a little more serious, and wondering whether she realized the importance of the plunge that she was about to take. She answered his unspoken thought at once.

"For goodness' sake, don't put such a grave face upon it! You will have plenty of time to look grave in the years that are coming—yes, and to repent too, I dare say. We shall only be young once. I want to enjoy it all—every bit of it—the fun of the thing, with the rest. Can't you understand?"

Claud was not quite sure that he could. He said, however, that her enjoyment would be his happiness, then and always, and for the rest, agreed with her that their hopes seemed to have the best chance of fulfillment through the medium of the consul at Port Ste. Marie.

"The secrecy of it is the only thing that worries me a little," he confessed at last. "You see, the governor has always been open and above-board with me; and if I were to find myself so placed that I could hardly avoid telling him lies—"

"Then, my dear, stupid boy, you would have to tell them. The sin of a lie consists in deceit, doesn't it? But deceive we must, so it can't matter much whether it is our words or only our acts that are untrue. It's an unpleasant necessity—neither more nor less. For the next few weeks you will have to come here every now and then—not too often, you know—and you will have to look as dejected as you can, and to be driven to take short voyages from time to time, in order to distract your thoughts. You mustn't let Mr. Gervis send you away; but you might, to keep him quiet, let fall occasional hints that you do not look forward to spending the winter here. As for our meeting, you must leave that to me; I shall be able to discover some safe way of managing it. And now the time has really come for us to bid each other an eternal farewell. If you meet papa, try to look as if you had been dissolved in tears."

The effect of all this was that Claud, despite his bliss, appeared at dinner that night with so hang-dog an expression of countenance as to completely allay any fears that may still have disturbed Mr. Gervis's peace, and to distress the tender-hearted Potts to that degree that she could scarcely manage to eat anything at all.

CHAPTER XXI.

PORT STE. MARIE.

A LINE drawn due south from the pier-heads at Beachborough across some hundred miles or so of sea would fall as nearly as possible upon the town and harbor of Port Ste. Marie, a *chef-lieu d'arrondissement* of the department of the Calvados, containing, according to the last census, 9753 in-

habitants, exclusive of 1500 English operatives, employed in the factories of the *banlieue*. Port Ste. Marie is little visited by tourists, having few attractions to offer to persons in search of the novel or beautiful, except a fine Norman church and some scanty vestiges of an ancient keep frowning above the tall white houses of the modern town. Its denizens, though sharing in the general picturesqueness of the fishing population of northern France, possess nothing distinctive in the way of physique or costume, while the primitive nature of its sanitary arrangements is apt to thrust itself somewhat disagreeably upon the attention of the traveler. What could have induced Mr. Claud to shape his course for this uninteresting and evil-smelling spot when he might just as well have steered for Cherbourg or Hâvre, was more than Mr. Evans, the master of the *Siren*, could understand; but Evans, whom many years' experience had accustomed to the eccentric movements of his employers, was a well-paid, easy-going, good-natured person, and he consoled himself with the reflection that at least there was no "dratted bar" at the entrance of the Port Ste. Marie harbor, and that the town must certainly contain some *café-chantant* at which he could kill time, so soon as he should have got his vessel safely alongside of the quay and made all snug for the night.

Claud himself was willing enough to condone the defective civilization of the little town in consideration of the privacy which it afforded. Landing early in the morning, after a long and rather rough passage, he was delighted to perceive that among the crowd which had collected on the wooden pier to see the yacht come in there was not a single well-dressed individual, much less an Englishman. Consciousness of guilt had so acted upon his nerves that the mere sight of a fellow-countryman would have made him fancy that all was discovered, and it was a positive relief to him to learn that Her Britannic Majesty's representative was not of his own nationality.

"*M. le consul anglais?*" said the smooth-shaven waiter at the Hôtel de Paris in answer to his inquiry: "that must be M. l'Hérisson. Hé! Jean—Pierre! it is M. l'Hérisson, is it not, who is consul for everybody?"

And a shrill voice replying from some unseen quarter in the affirmative, Claud's informant, who was in the act of serving him with an ample, if somewl at over-unctuous breakfast, proceeded: "Perfectly. Monsieur has only to take the first turn to the left, on leaving the hotel, and follow the rue des Cordeliers, which mounts the hill. Monsieur will see the coat-of-arms at the entrance of No. 16. M. l'Hérisson lives on the second floor."

Following these directions, Claud soon reached a gateway adorned not with one, but with many coats-of-arms. There were the stars and stripes of the United States, the spread eagle of Germany, the white cross of Italy, and numerous other well-known devices on neat little shields, our own glorious lion and unicorn finding a humble position between the kingdom of Denmark and the republic of Guatemala. Evidently the waiter had been guilty of no exaggeration in describing M. l'Hérisson as "the consul for everybody;" and it was a striking proof of the parsimony with which governments are wont to treat their agents abroad that this pluralist should have been driven to seek a lodging on the second floor above the entresol, with two milliners and a wine merchant beneath him.

Claud climbed the dirty, creaking stairs, and was presently ushered into an uncarpeted office containing three or four rush-bottomed chairs, a large writing-table, a number of tin boxes, and very little else. M. le Consul was breakfasting, the old *bonne* who admitted him said; and, upon Claud's expressing a polite wish that her master might not be disturbed, answered reassuringly, with a short laugh, "*Il ne se dérangera pas, allez!*"

Indeed the would-be bridegroom had to wait a good half-hour before the door slowly opened to admit a stout, sleepy-looking personage and a fine whiff of garlic and *pot-au-feu*. M. l'Hérisson advanced deliberately, wiping his lips with a large pocket-handkerchief. Probably he had not expected to encounter a visitor of Claud's distinguished appearance; for he made a low bow and muttered a sort of apology. They had not told him who it was that was waiting. People were always coming to bother him at all hours of the day upon the most shallow pretexts. "If it is for a permission to view the fortifications, monsieur, I regret to be unable to procure it for you. The authorities—"

Claud explained that it was a matter of personal business that had brought him to M. l'Hérisson's office. "I believe," said he, "that marriages between British subjects abroad are generally solemnized in the presence of the resident consul. Have you ever been called upon to perform such a ceremony?"

M. l'Hérisson, who had seated himself behind the writing-table, and was taking a pinch of snuff, smiled—the long, slow smile of obesity. "Hundreds!" he answered. "We have here quite a population of your compatriots—monsieur is, I presume, an Englishman, though he speaks with a Parisian accent—a population of operatives. All that marries itself perpetually, has children, demands to be domiciled in France and to escape all taxes and liabilities—it is incredible, the trouble

that one has with them! Monsieur is perhaps interested in two of these persons?"

Claud did not much enjoy the process of stating his business; but he had rehearsed the scene beforehand, and was determined that he would not be shamefaced over it.

"It is my own marriage that I wish to be performed in your presence, M. l'Hérisson," he said. "Here is my card. I have called upon you to make the necessary arrangements and to inquire what are the formalities to be gone through in these cases. For reasons, with which I need not trouble you—family reasons—I and my future wife desire to be married quietly in a quiet place; and we have fixed upon Port Ste. Marie as being a town in which our privacy is not likely to be intruded upon. I trust that you will see no objection to gratifying this—little whim of ours."

M. l'Hérisson had adjusted a pair of silver-rimmed spectacles upon his nose, and after examining Claud's card through them and then surveying the speaker over them, passed his hand once or twice across a vast and stubby chin before he replied. Doubtless he was able to form a pretty shrewd guess at the nature of the business which he was being asked to carry through, and it may have occurred to him that the result of it might not improbably be that he should get himself into trouble.

"Provided," said he at length, "that certain conditions are fulfilled, I have no authority to make objections. I beg you to observe, M. Gervisse, that I ask for no information. I do my duty as consul, upon your demand, and I cannot be made to incur any responsibility, beyond certifying that the parties are duly qualified to contract a matrimonial engagement, and that the requisitions of the law have been complied with. If, for example—pardon me the illustration—you should have taken it into your head to marry your *femme de ménage*, no blame could at any future time attach to me for having enabled you to do what your family might not approve of."

"That is quite understood," answered Claud; "and I will undertake that you shall incur no annoyance whatever. Also I assure you that I am not going to marry the *femme de ménage*, but a lady in my own rank of life. Now as to those conditions that you mentioned."

"I am empowered," said M. l'Hérisson in a gabbling monotonous voice, as if determined to act as far as possible the part of an automaton, "to grant a license for a marriage, and to solemnize the same, seven days after having received due notice of one of the contracting parties having been resident not less than fifteen days in the district to which I am accredited as consul."

"Three weeks! that will be confoundedly inconvenient." muttered Claud.

M. l'Hérisson proceeded, without noticing the aside—"Which notice must comprise a solemn declaration that there is no lawful hindrance or impediment to the marriage, and that, where one of the parties is under age, the consent of the person or persons whose consent is required by the law has been given. Such, monsieur, is the course of procedure in the case of marriages with license. Marriages without license, for which the fees are somewhat lower, can only be solemnized after notice of both the contracting parties having been resident in the place for a period of seven days; and this notice must be posted in the consulate, in a conspicuous position, during twenty-one successive days—"

"Thank you; that wouldn't do at all; we needn't trouble about that," interrupted Claud. "There doesn't seem to be very much difficulty about the matter. I understand you, then, that I shall have to take up my abode at Port Ste. Marie for three weeks. There is no way of getting out of that obligation, I suppose?"

M. l'Hérisson shook his head solemnly.

"Well; it is a nuisance; but it can't be helped. I am much indebted to you for your information, monsieur, and I will make the proper declaration when the time comes. As to the religious ceremony, there is, I believe, an English resident clergyman here."

"Without doubt: the reverend Higgins—rue du Temple, No. 3—an excellent man! In the exercise of my functions with regard to British subjects, I am in the habit of paying special attention to the recommendations of the reverend Higgins. It is he who interests himself in the welfare of his compatriots: I, you understand—I am but a machine. Go and see this good Higgins, M. Gervisse: he will give you paternal counsels. For me—if I may take the liberty, as an old man, of addressing a word of caution to a young one—I would remind you that there is not in this world a more easy thing to gain, nor a more troublesome thing to possess, nor a more difficult thing to get rid of, than a wife."

And with this abominable apothegm M. l'Hérisson took another pinch of snuff, and bowed his visitor out.

Claud went down the stairs, laughing. Except as regarded that tiresome *sine quâ non* of a three weeks' sojourn at Port Ste. Marie, things seemed to be shaping themselves in a fairly satisfactory manner, and he was not altogether sorry that the consul should have divined the nature of the services required of him, since it was evident that that fat and lazy personage

might be counted upon not to give information to the young lady's friends, or to make himself otherwise obnoxious in the matter. It remained to be seen whether the parson would prove equally complaisant.

Mr. Higgins was not to be found at his residence, and had to be pursued into the dingy suburb inhabited by his flock, where, after a long and tortuous chase, he was at length run down, hurrying from house to house, with a bundle of books under one arm and a large packet of tea under the other. He was a small, sandy-haired man, with a kind, ugly face, whose rusty pepper-and-salt suit, broad white neck-cloth and straw hat seemed to proclaim him a member of the moderate evangelical subdivision. "Just the sort of good conscientious creature who might think it his duty to throw the fat in the fire," thought Claud, taking a few rapid mental notes of his new acquaintance. "Clearly this is a case for a little righteous dissimulation."

To hoodwink worthy Mr. Higgins was no very difficult task; and it only cost our young Machiavelli a contribution of ten pounds towards the church restorations and a patient half-hour's audience of the sufferings of the English poor at Port Ste. Marie to establish himself firmly in the pastor's good graces. The impression conveyed to the mind of the latter was that his interlocutor was a wealthy and benevolent man, whom eccentricity, or, more properly speaking, good sense, had impelled to give his friends the slip, and to celebrate his wedding *sub rosâ* in a foreign land, thus escaping those dreary nuptial festivities which in England would have been unavoidable. With subtle candor, Claud made no secret either of his own name and address or of those of the young lady to whom he was engaged; but it is to be feared that, in mentioning Southlands and the yacht which Mr. Higgins had seen entering the harbor that morning, he omitted to explain that these desirable possessions were not his own property. He had made all the needful arrangements for his marriage, he said, with the consul, before whom, as he understood, the only legal contract could be entered into. "But," he added, "we shall wish to have the usual religious rite afterwards."

"I should hope so indeed!" cried Mr. Higgins, slightly scandalized.

"That is a matter of course; and therefore, my dear sir, we shall claim your kind offices in about a month's time. I will let you know the exact date on my return. In the mean time, I hope we shall see a good deal of one another. Perhaps you and Mrs. Higgins would pardon a bachelor's rough fare, and dine with me on board the yacht this evening?"

From all this it will be perceived how readily our fallen nature lends itself to the practice of double-dealing, and with what ease a naturally sensitive conscience may be stifled after a first lapse from the straight path of veracity. Mr. and Mrs. Higgins were entertained that night on board the *Siren* at a highly *recherché* little dinner, to which, by an after-thought, M. l'Herisson was also bidden; and Claud set sail for England on the following morning with the pleasant conviction that he was leaving none but friends and well-wishers behind him.

He was not asked at Southlands for any more information about his cruise than he chose to volunteer. It was generally understood in the household that he was suffering under a heavy disappointment, which, however salutary it might prove to be for him in the long run, demanded on all hands forbearance for the time being; and there was a tacit agreement that he was to be allowed to recover himself in his own way, and that no one was to interfere with his movements or worry him with questions. Under ordinary circumstances, Geneviève might have evinced something more than silent sympathy with her brother; but at this especial time Geneviève happened to be a good deal taken up with matters affecting her own destiny, which matters both Lady Croft and Freddy took care that she should not forget.

It was the opinion of those who knew Freddy best that their poor friend was very far gone indeed. That he should follow Miss Gervis about like a dog proved nothing; he had followed so many ladies about in similar fashion upon former occasions. But when he was found, one morning, poring over a volume of Browning's poems, with ruffled hair and a rueful and distraught countenance, and could give no other explanation of this astonishing conduct than that a fellow really ought to improve his mind, you know; and when, without assigning any reason whatever, he actually absented himself from the great autumn handicaps, it was evident that things had come to a truly serious pass with him. Never before had man or woman been known to keep Freddy Croft away from Newmarket when the Cesarewitch and the Cambridgeshire were being run.

"Melancholy spectacle, I hear," remarked Lord Lynchester, meeting the present chronicler in St. James's Street, and deigning to recognize him. "Girl plays the fiddle, and poor old Freddy hops about after her like a tame bear, they say. One more good man gone wrong, eh?"

Making due allowance for a graceful freedom of metaphor, the picture was only too true a one. Whatsoever may have been the ties by means of which the fair violinist held Freddy in thrall—and whether they were fiddle-strings or apron-strings

or heart-strings signifies little—they were strong enough to deprive him not only of liberty, but of the wish for it, and to keep him at Southlands, a willing captive.

Claud found him there upon his return, and took in the situation at a glance. So much struck, indeed, was he with the remarkable discovery which he had made that he took an early opportunity of communicating it to Miss Potts, by whom it was anything but well received.

"My dear Mr. Claud," exclaimed that justly irritated duenna, "do you think I have lost the use of my eyes, or do you take me for a deaf and dumb idiot? You must pardon my saying that, if you had been in full possession of your own senses during the summer, you would have found out before this what has been patent to everybody else for months past."

Claud stroked his chin reflectively, and said, "Dear me!"

"It has been a terrible trouble and anxiety to me. Dear Geneviève is so reserved, and I cannot ask for her confidence; and I feel that a great weight of responsibility rests upon my shoulders, and I have no one to speak to or to advise me," continued poor Miss Potts, almost tearfully. "I hardly know what to think or what to wish."

"Then I'll tell you, Miss Potts; wish that it may end in a match. Do you know, I am very much pleased at this. It never occurred to me that Freddy and Gen would be likely to suit one another; but if they do, I think we may fairly congratulate them both. It seems to me that it would be a capital thing in every way."

"I don't know; I am not sure," said Miss Potts doubtfully. "Sir Frederick is of a mercurial temperament, I fear. And then, if matters should turn out as we anticipate, what would the Princess say? I feel certain that she would never forgive me."

"Ah, yes; you will get a blowing up from that quarter, I dare say," observed Claud. "Varinka, I suspect, would have liked to marry Gen to a Frenchman or a Russian, and to keep her under her own eye in Paris; but between you and me, I have a notion that the governor does not mean to consent to any arrangement of that kind."

"What *does* he mean?—what *does* he intend?—that is what I want to know," cried Miss Potts. "But of course you cannot tell me. No one can tell what his projects may be; and often I am afraid that he would never consent to making anybody happy. Do you ever say your prayers, Mr. Claud?"

"Do I what?—do I—oh—er—yes, sometimes, of course," answered Claud, looking a little abashed.

"Then, the next time that you do so, you might pray Heaven to soften that—that—to soften your father's heart. I may be

doing him an injustice—if so, I humbly ask pardon, and hope I may be forgiven—but I can never look at him without being reminded of Pharaoh, king of Egypt."

"Why? Because he is plagued? I know it is a mere waste of breath to take up the governor's defense before you, or Gen, or Varinka. The three of you have agreed to make a scapegoat of him, and I suppose you must be left to find out your mistake, and repent at your leisure. They say a woman cannot live without having somebody to love; but upon my word, I believe somebody to hate is quite as essential a condition of feminine happiness. One comfort is that the governor doesn't care."

"Neither did Pharaoh care. He could speak smooth things, when it suited his purpose; but he hardened his heart, and he would not let the people go," said Miss Potts, gathering up her shawl majestically about her shoulders, and preparing to quit the field.

"Varinka can't complain that she has not been allowed to go, anyhow," retorted Claud. But Miss Potts had already disappeared.

Probably self-accusation had a good deal to do with Claud's championship of Mr. Gervis. Not to him, at all events, had that much-abused man shown himself a hard task-master. Fate, it was true, had unhappily decreed that the father and son should be antagonists upon one important point; but the former had declared war openly, honorably, and in no ungenerous fashion, whereas the latter could not but feel that he was about to snatch the victory by underhand means.

When, however, he confided his scruples to Nina, as he found an opportunity of doing before very long, she was able in some measure to allay them.

"I really don't see that you have been anything but perfectly honest with Mr. Gervis," she declared. "You gave him fair warning that you intended to marry, and it is not from him that we are running away. It seems to me that if anybody has a right to complain of being taken in, it is my father, not yours. But oh, what *does* it matter? They will both make a great fuss at first, I dare say; but things will settle down quickly, and in a year's time they will almost have forgotten that they ever objected to our marriage."

Claud had not much confidence in the fulfillment of this prediction so far as one of the malcontents was concerned; but time was too precious to be wasted in debating the inevitable, and many important matters had to be talked over and settled during the stolen meeting which prudence compelled the lovers to cut as short as might be. It was agreed that Claud should

return to France the next day, and that, immediately upon the expiration of the three weeks, Nina, accompanied by a trustworthy maid, should join him. There is a small steamer which plies regularly twice a week between Beachborough and Port Ste. Marie, usually arriving at the latter place early in the morning, and it was by means of this rather uncomfortable craft that Miss Flemyng proposed to effect her flight.

"No; you are on no account to dream of coming back for me," she said, in answer to Claud's demurrer. "I know how to look after myself, and I shall enjoy the excitement of it beyond everything. And you must not write: let us have no unnecessary risks. The only horrid part of it is that I shall literally have no clothes, except what I can wear, or stuff into a hand-bag; but I shall be able to get an outfit as soon as we reach Paris. Go now. If we were to be caught together, or our plan were discovered and put a stop to, I should simply lie down and die of shame and disgust."

Claud has since declared that for no imaginable consideration could he be induced to live over again the three weeks of his compulsory exile at Port Ste. Marie. For the first fortnight it blew and rained incessantly; he was absolutely without means of killing time—for he had judged it prudent to send the yacht round to Cherbourg to await further orders—M. l'Hérisson was not an entertaining companion; and he dared not frequent the society of Mr. Higgins, who had an innocent way of putting the most embarrassing questions, and who once threw him into an agony of terror by talking of treating himself to a two days' holiday, if the weather would improve, and running across to Beachborough for a change. When Claud heard this alarming proposition, he said to himself that to Beachborough Mr. Higgins should not go, even though it should be necessary to keep him at Port Ste. Marie by pushing him into the harbor at the moment of embarkation; but happily an unexpected pressure of work prevented the pastor from recurring to the subject, or seeing much of the expectant bridegroom, who passed his days chiefly in roaming about the muddy streets, in asking at the *poste restante* for letters and receiving none, and in tormenting himself with visions of calamities which might be occurring, or about to occur, on the other side of the water. What if Nina were to fall ill?—or if her father were to insist upon sending her away upon a lengthened visit to some relative?—or if some accident were to render it impossible for her to catch the steamer? Besides these natural fears, he may have had sundry other half-acknowledged misgivings; for solitude, rain, and suspense are enough to try the stoutest heart; and, after all, it is one thing to thrust your head into a

noose in a moment of excitement and another to spend twenty-one days in deliberately making preparations for the catastrophe. But the heavy-footed hours marched on, forming themselves into days and weeks, and in the end came a brisk northerly wind, with frost and sunshine and promise of a bright wedding morning.

One more trial, however, was in store for Claud's already over-tried nerves. Wandering among the ruins of the old castle one morning, he became aware of a small party of equestrians—two ladies and three cavaliers—mounted on those long-tailed, prancing steeds which are the delight of the Parisian "*aux eaux*." Evidently some loiterers who had outstaid the season at one of the watering-places which lie within easy distance of Port Ste. Marie. Seeing them dismount, and divining their intention of picnicking under the shadow of the keep, Claud turned away, and was leisurely descending the slope, when one of the ladies caught sight of him, and following him with quick steps, cut him lightly over the shoulder with her riding-whip. He wheeled round and found himself face to face with his step-mother.

"Varinka!"

"At your service, monsieur. I saw the yacht at Cherbourg yesterday; I went on board and learnt that you were here; and as long rides are the only amusement left to me in the detestable place where I am staying, I thought it would give an object to our excursion to-day if I were to seek you out in your retreat. Indiscreet if you like, *mais enfin!*—"

"Not in the least indiscreet," answered Claud politely. "You are still at Trouville then?"

"Till Thursday. Upon that day, Heaven be praised, my lease of my *châlet* expires, and I shall make a move upon Paris. So you are delighted to see me, are you? You have not the appearance of being overjoyed. Never mind; I will tell no tales. Oh, I know my world; I know that when young men bury themselves in a fishing-village, it is because they are not alone there," says the little Princess, with a smile full of meaning.

It was perhaps just as well that her experience of the ways of young men should have misled her in the present instance, and Claud did not defend himself against her insinuations. "I know my world too," returned he, laughing; "and I know that you did not come here for the pleasure of meeting me. In what way can I delight myself by serving you?"

"In the simplest way possible. I want to hear what is going on over there in England—what *he* means to do with my poor Geneviève. I have been most uneasy—most unhappy about

her; and she writes the shortest letters, and tells me nothing at all."

"I thought Miss Potts sent you a volume of news every week," said Claud.

"Potts is a monster of deceit and ingratitude! I have broken with Potts. She is in the conspiracy against me, like the rest of you. It is very hard to be able to trust nobody—not even those whom one loves most!" cried Varinka, with real tears in her eyes.

"What do you mean?" asked Claud.

"As if you did not know! I have understood it all from the first. His object is to deprive me of the only creature who cares for me; to marry Geneviève in England, where he knows that I shall never be able to see her, and to leave me utterly alone in the world. But I do not yet hold myself beaten; and you may tell him so from me. I had his promise that he would restore Geneviève to me free, and as soon as I am established at home again, I mean to claim it."

"If he promised you that, he will do it," said Claud, prudently resolving to arouse no premature storms by a reference to Freddy Croft.

Varinka tapped her white teeth with the handle of her whip meditatively. "He is quite clever enough to find a way of breaking his word and keeping it at the same time," she remarked. "But now tell me the truth; what is this young Croft? Has he serious intentions? is he dangerous? does Geneviève encourage him?"

Claud, however, was very circumspect, and would tell nothing. Certainly Freddy was often at Southlands; in the country one naturally sees a good deal of one's neighbors. He (Claud) really could not say whether Geneviève liked him better than other young men. Should have imagined that, if she had had any confidences to make, she would have reposed them in the Princess. Knew nothing of Mr. Gervis's designs, and did not, for his part, believe that his father had any. And so forth, and so forth—coming out of his cross-examination, upon the whole, not discreditably. After a time Varinka, finding that there was no information to be got out of him, let him go. She would have introduced him to her friends and made him welcome to a share of the good things which were being carried up from the hotel; but he begged to be excused, not feeling himself in the humor for social intercourse, and took his leave.

"Why do you not come and see me in Paris?" the Princess called after him. "Have you not had enough of that horrible English solitude?"

"I mean to go to Paris. I shall see you there very soon," Claud answered. And he wondered, as he strolled down towards the town, what kind of reception she would accord to Mrs. Claud Gervis. Probably a gracious one, he thought, for Varinka always adored new friends for a time; moreover, a marriage which was distasteful to her husband must, from that fact alone, be agreeable to her. He had no wish, however, that she should get any inkling of what was imminent; and it was with much relief that, looking down from his bedroom window an hour later, he saw her and her party curvetting and clattering out of the courtyard of the hotel.

The sun of his wedding morning was hardly above the horizon before Claud was out upon the cliff, watching anxiously for the approach of the little Beachborough steamer. He had a long time to wait, fidgeting to and fro, cold, nervous, and filled with restless forebodings; for he had risen much too early, and his vigil would certainly have been prolonged by an hour or two, if the weather had been in its normal condition at that season of the year. But, as luck would have it, the day proved one of those perfectly still ones which sometimes intervene between the late autumn gales. A thin layer of clouds was spread low above a gray and glassy sea; mists hung motionless over the surface of the water; and about eight o'clock, long before the steamer was in sight, Claud's ear caught the far-away beating of her paddles.

Nina had enjoined him on no account to meet her on the quay; for the captain and crew of the vessel, being Beachborough men, would have recognized him, and naturally drawn their own conclusions. He had, therefore, to return to the hotel, and to pass through a further period of suspense, which seemed to him interminable; but just as he had made up his mind that some awful calamity must have occurred, the clanging bell which gave notice of the arrival of travelers at the Hôtel de Paris roused the echoes, and Miss Flemyng, calm, smiling, and not veiled, walked in through the *porte-cochère*, attended by her maid and followed by a porter wheeling two trunks of goodly dimensions upon a barrow. She was so cool, and bore the inquisitive glances of the landlord and his underlings with such complete indifference that Claud was ashamed of his own perturbation.

"I have managed to bring a few things with me, after all, you see," she said, pointing to the luggage. "When the time came nearer I felt that it would be so horribly inconvenient to have nothing to wear that I resolved to bear away some of my belongings or to perish in the attempt. I told papa I was going to stay with a friend—literal truth, you know, which is

what you have such a weakness for—drove to the station, boxes and all, dismissed the carriage, walked down to the boat, and then sent two sailors back to claim my property. We had a delightful passage; only I am almost dead of starvation. Will there be time for me to have some breakfast? Yes? Well then, please order them to get something ready while I am dressing, and we will tell each other all our news when I come down. I am too tired and hungry and dirty to talk now."

Her self-possession had its effect upon Claud, who awoke to the advisability of keeping up appearances in the presence of so many curious spectators; and he contrived presently to eat a very good breakfast opposite to her, while informing her in an undertone of the arrangements which he had made and instructing her as to her part in the impending formalities.

Never, probably, was a runaway marriage celebrated in a more matter-of-course manner. Breakfast over, the bride and bridegroom walked together to the consulate; and there, in the presence of M. l'Hérisson, Claud Gervis, bachelor, and Georgina Flemyng, spinster, having declared that they knew of no impediment why they should not be joined together in matrimony, and having called upon the two attendant clerks to witness that they took one another respectively as husband and wife, were united by a tie as binding as the law could make it. All passed off smoothly; but when the little procession entered the church, and Mr. Higgins perceived that the lady was accompanied by neither father, mother, nor guardian, that worthy divine's countenance fell, and he plainly began to suspect that all was not quite as it should be. As, however, he had got his surplice on, and as the parties were already *de jure* man and wife, it was rather too late in the day to hesitate about pronouncing the Church's blessing upon their union, and he confined himself to pointing out to Claud, in an agitated aside, that there was apparently no one present to give the bride away. M. l'Hérisson gallantly offered to repair this omission; and Mrs. Higgins, in the absence of a more duly qualified person, was good enough to drop a few motherly tears upon her open prayer-book.

Late that same afternoon, when the newly-married pair were driving away from the Paris terminus, the following succinct telegram reached the person to whom it was addressed.

"*N. Flemyng, Port Ste. Marie, to J. Flemyng, Esq., The Moated House, Beachborough, England.*—Married to Claud Gervis this morning. Sorry to have caused inconvenience. Better put announcement in papers, save appearances. Will write to-morrow."

CHAPTER XXII.

A PLEASANT PARTY.

THE news of the escapade recorded in the last chapter created, as may be supposed, no small stir in Beachborough and its neighborhood, and was not slow to spread itself over a much wider area. Asiatics, it is said, have some mysterious manner of transmitting intelligence from city to city with greater rapidity than any known means of communication can carry it. I have no personal experience of Indian bazaars; but I am continually coming across, in my own country, phenomena in the way of conveying information which I am sure would be no discredit to Delhi, Baroda, or Peshawur; and it is a fact, the explanation of which I leave to the curious, that whereas Mr. Flemyng can hardly have received the dispatch telling him of his daughter's flight before six o'clock P.M., I was accosted at eleven o'clock that same night in the smoking-room of my club, by a Lynshire acquaintance, who asked me whether I had heard that young Gervis had bolted with that pretty girl who used to be always about with the Crofts.

Confirmatory details reached me later. From my grandmother (to whom I applied) I obtained, it is true, nothing but the briefest and driest statement of the facts, for Mrs. Knowles is not fond of committing her sentiments to paper; but others were less guarded in their utterances, and as there are many Beachborough people who are kind enough to look me up whenever they spend a day or two in London, I was furnished, before the week was out, with a full and particular account of how the affair had happened, and also, as I need hardly say, with several versions of how it had not. My informants differed considerably, both as to the circumstances of the case and as to their verdict upon them, some taking the part of the old people, some that of the young, some asserting that Claud had a considerable fortune in his own right, which his father was compelled to surrender to him on his marriage, others that the improvident couple had not a penny between them, and would soon be reduced to beggary, while a few—these were ladies, I am afraid—had ascertained for a fact that there had been no marriage, at Port Ste. Marie or elsewhere, until Mr. Flemyng had threatened to cross the water himself, and resort to measures of compulsion. Nearly all, however, were agreed that it was a discreditable, not to say disgraceful business from beginning to end.

But perhaps the general view was most aptly and concisely expressed by Colonel Finch, whom I met one evening descending the steps of the military club to which he belongs, and who caught me by the arm while he jerked out a few sentences in his peculiar, high-pitched voice.

"So our young friend at Southlands has been making an ass of himself, I hear—making an ass of himself—what? Girl's fault, of course—always is in these cases—yes. Sharp girl too—eye to the main chance—what? But must have taken some romantic notion into her head—some romantic notion. Stupid affair, very: what the young fellows call bad form. When you and I were boys"—pretty cool, this, considering that Colonel Finch used to tip me in my school-days—"when you and I were boys, Knowles, that sort of thing used to be done. Gretna Green, and a blacksmith fellow who tied the knot for you, and the irate parents following you in a post-chaise, and all that—yes. We used to be in a deuce of a fright of our fathers, and small blame to us! But nobody is in a fright of his father nowadays, and nobody ever thinks of running away to be married. Only get laughed at if you do. Great mistake to get laughed at—yes."

I didn't laugh much myself, though I was certainly inclined to agree with Colonel Finch in thinking that poor Claud had acted the part of an ass in this matter. A lonely bachelor of my age, without home ties or much of a life of his own to look forward to, is apt to interest himself in the fortunes of younger men, and to experience vicariously their loves and ambitions, their failures and successes. I have identified myself in this way with a good many promising youths, first and last, and I am bound to say that most of them have disappointed me abominably. Here, for instance, was one of whom considerable things might reasonably have been expected—a fellow with a handsome face, winning manners and good expectations, not to mention a share of brains considerably above the average,—saddling himself, at the outset of his career, with a flirting wife, quarreling with his father, and surrendering the liberty which, in my humble judgment, all sensible folks ought to preserve up to the age of thirty at least. When people in whom I feel an interest behave like that, I can't help resenting their conduct as something in the nature of a personal slight; and what added to my annoyance in the present instance was that my annual Christmas visit to Beachborough was at hand, and that I had been looking forward to a renewal of my friendship with young Gervis, for whose future guidance, indeed, I had been at the pains of sketching out sundry schemes which must now be rendered abortive.

In my grandmother's drawing-room, which I entered, a few days later, simultaneously with the afternoon tea which I drink and she despises, I dwelt with some bitterness upon the frustration of these well-meant designs. I had hoped, I said, to induce Claud to read for the bar; to get him up to London, where he would have been able to combine instruction in the laws and constitution of his country with a practical insight into the workings of modern English society. I had looked forward to seeing him in parliament, pushing his way towards the front in political life, which is the first and best of all occupations, if only a man have the requisite means to enable him to pursue it. But now he had done for himself. With a wife and a diminished income, and a host of potential children, and an offended and capricious father (who by the way, might live for another twenty years) in the background, what hope was there that he would ever lift his head above the struggling crowd of indigent mediocrities? It was most disheartening to be baulked in this way time after time—enough to disgust a man with his fellow-creatures. I concluded by observing, with more truth than originality, that women had been at the root of all mischief and trouble from the days of Eve downwards.

But my grandmother was, for reasons best known to herself, in a bad temper, and denied me the solace of her sympathy.

"There are more fools walking about in breeches than in petticoats, according to my notion," said she, in answer to my last remark; "and for a downright mischievous fool, commend me to one who is forever meddling with his neighbor's business. When a man has made a failure of his own life," she added, rather cruelly, "I can't for the life of me see why he should fancy that he has a gift for assisting Providence to shape the lives of other people. I don't mean to discuss the Gervises with you. I've heard them and their affairs and their ways of going on chattered over during the last few months till I am sick and tired of the subject. There are a dozen people coming to dinner presently. You can gossip with them to your heart's content and nothing will give them greater pleasure than to furnish you with all the particulars of this precious elopement. In the mean time you had better go and get dressed, or you will make the first arrivals your enemies for life by not being in the room to receive them."

Have I ever, I wonder, got through one of my grandmother's ceremonious dinner-parties without contriving to offend somebody? I dread those solemn banquets: the recollection of past blunders leads me to approach them with so much nervousness that some fresh *fiasco* on my part is almost a foregone

conclusion. If only the dear old lady would take the marshaling of her guests into her own hands, or if at least she would allow me to carry a written list of them, properly divided into couples, all might be well; but she can never be brought to consent to either of these courses, and the consequence is that I am perpetually violating the order of precedence in a way which nothing but respect for Mrs. Knowles could induce the slighted persons to overlook. I know I am much to blame in this matter. I admit that, if the Duchess of Hightown, who is the daughter of a duke, is entitled to display wrath at being asked to walk behind the Duchess of Mightytown, whose father was only a marquis, Mrs. Whipper, as being the daughter of a baron's younger son's eldest son, has an equal right to complain of being sent in to dinner after Mrs. Snapper, who can but claim a baronet for her grandfather; but I think it might be taken as an extenuating circumstance that we have a red book to guide us in the former case and not in the latter; and as my own lot in life brings me into contact rather with baronets' granddaughters than with duchesses, I hope I may be permitted to take this opportunity of assuring my friends that when I err, my offense should not be attributed to ignorance or want of respect for their several dignities, but simply to the inroads of a treacherous memory. I am sorry to say that upon the occasion of the feast which the progress of my narrative now leads me to refer to, I fell into a more than usually stupid blunder.

"Good Gawd, sir! you're all wrong," whispered Hicks to me in agitated accents, as I passed him on my way towards the dining-room, with Mrs. Pender on my arm.

Of course I was all wrong! I recollected immediately Mrs. Bagshawe's grandfather in the peerage of Ireland—or rather; I recollected that he belonged to her; for in truth the deceased nobleman had been very present in my mind all the time that I had been dressing for dinner, only I had fathered him upon the wrong lady,—and now here was Mrs. Bagshawe taking her place upon my left hand with an expression of sorrow rather than of anger upon her face, while the Admiral, less accustomed to self-repression, was glowering at me furiously from the other end of the table.

We don't ignore these little mistakes in Beachborough. We expect a full and speedy apology for them, and I don't know what would not happen if it were withheld. I made haste to excuse myself as best I could to my neighbor. "So stupid of me! I can't think how I can have made such a mistake! All I can do is to throw myself upon your kindness," etc., etc.

"Oh, it is of no consequence," she answers sweetly. "For my own part, I am perfectly indifferent as to who may take me into dinner, so long as it is not a disagreeable person. Still, there *is* a right way and a wrong way of doing everything—isn't there, Mr. Knowles?"

Quite so. I hang my abashed head. Presently, however, I become aware that Mrs. Bagshawe does not intend to be hard upon me this evening. From the pensive smile with which she contemplates me I gather that only a sense of what is due to herself keeps her from at once condoning my offense and allowing bygones to be bygones. Once or twice she opens her lips, gives a sort of gasp and a swallow, and closing them again, as if with an effort, looks down at her plate. From of old I know the interpretation of these signs. Mrs. Bagshawe has something of interest to communicate to me, and she is on tenter-hooks lest that pushing woman Mrs. Pender should forestall her. I feel that the least I can do is to give her a lead over the first fence, so to speak.

"Any Beachborough news, Mrs. Bagshawe?" I inquire pleasantly.

"*Well*—" she begins, her expressive countenance becoming forthwith irradiated with smiles. "But perhaps I ought not to talk about it. And very likely it might be no news to you, who are such a great friend of the family."

"I assure you I have heard next to nothing," I reply, wishing to please her. "I know, of course, that there has been a clandestine marriage; but my information does not extend much further."

"Oh, that is a very old story," says Mrs. Bagshawe quite contemptuously; "everybody knows all about *that*. But really they are such very strange people—there always seems to be something. Have you not heard anything lately about Miss Gervis?"

I shake my head.

"What, nothing about her and Sir Frederick Croft? Oh, Mr. Knowles, I am sure you must have heard; only you do not choose to commit yourself. You are so careful."

I protest against this unfounded accusation. A certain amount of reserve before strangers may, I point out, be advisable; but what need can there be for weighing every word when one is in the company of old friends, whose discretion is notorious? Thus encouraged, Mrs. Bagshawe confesses that she hates your over-cautious people, and without further beating about the bush, plunges into the midst of her subject:—

"I heard it this afternoon from Miss Pennefather, who had just seen Lady Croft, and who says there cannot be the slight-

est doubt about the truth of it. Sir Frederick proposed three days ago, and Mr. Gervis simply wouldn't hear of the match. No reason given—no conditions suggested—nothing! Simply a direct refusal. And that, although the girl herself had accepted him 'with avidity.' The expression is Miss Pennefather's, not mine, and I must say that I don't think it a very proper one. She says Lady Croft is in a dreadful state about it. Everybody knows his own business best, I suppose; but really, after all that has taken place don't you think it most extraordinary conduct, Mr. Knowles?"

"Oh, I never heard of such a thing."

"Just what I said myself!" cries Mrs. Bagshawe, rapping the table emphatically with her knife; "my very words! 'Miss Pennefather,' I said, 'I never heard of such a thing!' You see, if the young man had not been led on by every possible means, if he had not been encouraged to almost live in the house, and to go on in such a way that the whole county has been talking about him and her, it would be quite another case. I should be the last person to deny that Sir Frederick is in many respects undesirable as a son-in-law; he is not at all the sort of husband whom I should choose for one of *my* girls, for instance. But Mr. Gervis must have known perfectly well what he was about all through the summer; he has plenty of wits, I'll say that for him; and he cannot have had any doubt as to what the end of it would be. Depend upon it, there is more in all this than meets the eye. What is the man's motive?—that's what puzzles me—what is his motive?"

"*Pride*," says Mrs. Pender, in a deep, lugubrious voice. Mrs. Pender is a person of few words; but what she does say is usually much to the point. "The pride that exalteth itself shall be abased," she continues. "I have observed this man since he came among us. He arrived here with a doubtful reputation whether justly earned or not I do not say; I judge no man—but he was received with reserve, perhaps with some little coldness, and his object ever since has been to avenge himself upon us. Having no children myself, it does not become me to boast that I should refuse a son-in-law of Sir Frederick Croft's position; but it cannot be denied that, speaking from a worldly point of view, Sir Frederick is the most desirable match in Lynshire, and doubtless Mr. Gervis imagines that in rejecting him he has shown himself superior to us all. But let him take heed. Already one chastening blow has fallen upon him: it may yet be needful for his soul's welfare that Providence should humble him even to the dust."

Mrs. Pender is one of the most prominent and earnest members of the Vicar of Trinity's flock. Upright, charitable (in

the almsgiving sense of the word), a friend to missionaries and a deadly foe to ritualism, Romanism, skepticism, dancing, and card-playing—all of which she brackets together in one comprehensive anathema—she is held in high esteem by a certain section of the community, but is no favorite in our little society, which likes its whist-parties and other innocent pastimes. "Gad, sir!" said the Admiral to me, upon one occasion, "if that woman is as cock-sure of getting to Heaven as she professes to be, I don't think poor old Pender will mind much if he finds himself booked for t'other place." She has but to open her lips to insure a prompt contradiction from Mrs. Bagshawe.

"Pride indeed!" cries that lady; "oh, my dear Mrs. Pender, that is a little too absurd! No doubt we all have our besetting sins, and I could name one or two people who, for some reason or other, fancy themselves better than the rest of the world; but you will never convince me that Mr. Gervis is so devoid of common sense as to suppose that anybody, except himself and the Crofts would care whether he sent Sir Frederick about his business or not. No, no; he must have some less far-fetched reason than that for his actions. But I don't think you know him personally, do you? Didn't somebody tell me that he had never returned your visit? Very rude of him, I must say! But perhaps it was an oversight."

"Whoever told you that," answers Mrs. Pender, with rather unchristian warmth, "told you a deliberate falsehood. We have exchanged visits with the Southlands people; but I was not anxious that the acquaintance should go further. I did not desire to be seen frequently in the house of a man who has no settled religious convictions. Indeed, I often doubt whether I am not wrong in continuing to accept the hospitality of this place even to the limited extent that I do."

"Ah, well; the remedy is in your own hands, you know," observes Mrs. Bagshawe.

In this way the controversy assumed a more directly personal complexion, and Mr. Gervis's domestic affairs were temporarily lost sight of. But as soon as the ladies had left us, and I had changed my chair, according to custom, for that just vacated by my grandmother, the topic was reverted to with a promptitude which convinced me that Beachborough was as much intereste l as ever in the proceedings of its incomprehensible neighbor. An enforced silence had, I suspect, been hitherto observed, owing to the presence of Mrs. Knowles, whose disapprobation of idle talk is well known, and who had maintained a particularly stern and awful demeanor throughout the evening; but this restraint upon conversation being

now removed, there was nothing to prevent Admiral Bagshawe from speaking out his mind with his usual openness.

"The most outrageous piece of swagger and vulgar ostentation that could be imagined"—that was the Admiral's opinion of it. "Who the dickens cares whether Gervis is such a dashed fool as to think his daughter too good for anybody in Lynshire or not? Times are changed, I suppose. I have always understood that offers of marriage were considered as confidential communications; but here we have this fellow rushing down to the town post-haste, and telling the whole story to the first old woman he meets. Dashed ungentlemanly conduct, I call it—and impertinent too."

A modest interpolation to the effect that Lady Croft, not Mr. Gervis, appeared to have been Miss Pennefather's informant did not avail to lessen the severity of the Admiral's strictures.

"I don't care a brass farthing who spread the news; what I say is, the news ought not to have been spread at all; and wouldn't have been, unless Gervis had intended that it should. Don't tell *me!*"

Mr. Pender quotes the old saying about washing dirty linen at home in an impressive voice, as though that somewhat unsavory metaphor had just emerged from his own active brain, and goes on to observe that when people give themselves airs, one naturally inquires what ground they have for doing so. Who, he asks, are these Gervises, after all? What does anybody know about them, except that they have plenty of money? Here some one half-way down the table—a mere raw youth of two or three and forty, who ought to know better than to interrupt his seniors—has the temerity to mumble something about "a good old family."

"I believe, sir," says Mr. Pender loftily, "that that is a distinction to which most of us here can lay claim. My own family, I may say, is both a good and an old one."

At this the Admiral gives a tremendous barking cough which makes the glasses ring (for indeed it is a matter of notoriety that Pender *père* made his money in trade, which we in Beachborough still hold to be quite irreconcilable with gentility), and General Blair, catching an echo of this familiar war-cry, lifts his hand to his ear, and asks, "Eh? what's that?—what's he say?"

The Admiral squares himself to face his neighbor, and roars out—"Mr. Pender—says he belongs—to a good—old—family."

"Oh, ah! yes—yes—capital, capital!" answers the other veteran, chuckling.

I fear our poor old friend General Blair is breaking up fast. After this brief contribution to the harmony of the evening, he

sinks down in his chair, and relapses into a smiling silence. The conversation is taken up by fresh speakers, and as it proceeds, I perceive that Mr. Gervis has not known how to make friends for himself in the land of his birth. One remarks that, for such a rich man as he is said to be, he has not done much in the way of hospitality; another complains of his "nasty, sneering way of speaking to you"; a third has noticed that he can never look you in the face; it is universally agreed that he holds his head a deuced sight too high, by George, and that the misfortune that has fallen upon him in the matter of his son's marriage has been richly deserved.

Whence all this acrimony? To any one unacquainted with Beachborough it may appear a little inexplicable. I don't know whether other small towns resemble ours; but with us there has ever existed a strong feeling of solidarity—if I may be allowed to borrow a foreign word for which I can find no right equivalent. We cannot endure that a man should live among us and not be of us. Snubbing we can bear; quarreling we can bear, and even enjoy; but what wounds us in our most sensitive part is to be ignored; and it was of this offense that Mr. Gervis had been guilty. With the exception of that one appearance of his at the yeomanry ball, he had taken no part in local festivities; he had declined the invitations of the residents, and had sent them none in return; he had left cards at their respective doors, without asking to be admitted; he had behaved, in short, as if there were no flourishing sea-port and celebrated watering-place at his gates. Therefore it was that Mrs. Pender relied confidently upon Providence to humble him to the dust; therefore it was that her lord demanded to know who he was; therefore Admiral Bagshawe accused him of vulgar ostentation, and the chorus rejoiced over his calamities. The Admiral tersely summed up the case against him as we rose from the table.

"All dashed fine," says he; "but that sort of thing won't do with me. I mean to say, I don't care to put up with it. All my life long I've adopted one and the same plan with fellows who try to come the great man over me and ride the dashed high horse. I let 'em alone, sir—I let 'em alone."

It occurred to me that this form of chastisement would probably be accepted by Mr. Gervis with a good deal of equanimity; but I need hardly say that I kept my thoughts to myself, and we went up to the drawing-room to discover my grandmother seated in solitary state by the fireside, and the other ladies collected in a compact phalanx, their old noses almost touching in the warmth of earnest conversation. From the few words that caught my ear as we made our entry,

gathered that the subject of Miss Pennefather's startling news had not yet been exhausted. I hope the old women enjoyed themselves during the hour that succeeded: the old men did not, I know. We cordially detest that post-prandial hour in the drawing-room; but etiquette commands us to submit to it. No one dares to move until the lady highest in rank has risen from her chair; and then the rest of the company promptly jump up, and troop out of the room in her wake.

When I went upstairs again, after seeing the last of the guests into their fly, I found that Mrs. Knowles had already got out the old family Bible, and was waiting, spectacles on nose, for evening prayers, which ceremony is never dispensed with, even on dinner-party nights, under her roof. I knew, therefore, that any reference, that night, to Freddy Croft's alleged disappointment would be considered inopportune; and I had to go to bed without ascertaining whether my grandmother knew anything as to its truth. Nor did she prove to be in a more communicative mood the next morning. I spent that day partly at the club, partly in paying certain duty-calls, debating all the time with myself whether I would go to Southlands or not. I hesitated until the early darkness fell and it was too late to think of it any longer, and then returned to South Crescent; but at five o'clock I was destined to receive confirmation of Mrs. Bagshawe's story from the best of all sources. For at that hour, who should walk in, looking a trifle older and feebler, I thought, than when I had seen him last, but Mr. Gervis himself?

He was so obliging as to declare that he was particularly glad to see me in Beachborough again. Apart, he said, from the pleasure which it naturally gave him to renew our acquaintance, he must plead guilty to a selfish reason for welcoming me back—the hope, namely, that I would be kind enough to give him some assistance in the carrying out of a troublesome duty which had devolved upon him. I at once surmised that I was about to be asked to act in some manner as an intermediary between Southlands and Croft Manor, and hastened to assure Mr. Gervis of my readiness to be of use to him in any way that lay within the range of my poor abilities. Perhaps I may have an idea that I am peculiarly fitted by nature for the office of a peacemaker, and that my friends may credit me with some power of distinguishing myself in that modest capacity. It was with a good deal of surprise, therefore, that I learnt the nature of the services required of me.

"I am going," said Mr. Gervis, after politely thanking me in anticipation, "to entertain the natives. It will be a great trouble—an especial trouble under existing circumstances; but

I feel that it ought to be done, and I am sure that Mrs. Knowles will agree with me that duty must be placed above all other considerations. It was to consult her, in fact, with regard to invitations and so on that I came here; and now I have the good fortune to fall upon her grandson, who will be even better able to help me, and who must expect to suffer the penalty of bearing a character for good nature. If Claud had been here I should have left the arrangement of all details to him; but Claud, as you know, has left me. I trust, Mr. Knowles, that you won't refuse to come to the aid of an old man, who finds himself suddenly deprived of his right hand through no fault of his own."

Who could resist so pathetic an appeal? It is true that it was not uttered in very pathetic accents; but weakness in any shape was hardly to be expected of Mr. Gervis, and knowing, as I did, what Claud and he had been to one another, my pity for the forlorn father needed no artificial stimulus. At the risk of being thought impertinent, I could not help telling him how sorry I had been to hear of Claud's ill-advised marriage.

He shrugged his shoulders expressively. "I did what I could to prevent it," said he; "but I failed. Matrimony, it would appear, presents especial dangers to our family. I am sorry for Claud; but he has chosen for himself, with his eyes open, and he must take the consequences. I wish he could have made it convenient to put off his nuptials until after this festival, or at least that he had thought of leaving me some sort of instructions to work upon. Ought I to encourage local enterprise, do you think?—or would you advise me to write up to London? I have heard that there are contractors there who will take the whole business off your hands, and provide you with everything—band, lights, supper, and all the rest of it—at a fixed charge."

"You don't mean to say," ejaculated my grandmother, peering at him over her spectacles, "that you are thinking of giving a ball!"

"Subject to your approval, my dear Mrs. Knowles. I have not sent out my invitations yet; but I can see no other way of satisfying the community at large. To receive all these good creatures at dinner would probably bring about my demise long before the list was exhausted; and besides, there would not be time, for in a week or ten days from now I intend to break up my establishment here."

"I suspected how it would be," said my grandmother, with a grim chuckle. "I thought Beachborough would not do for very long. So you are off on your travels again?"

"I am off somewhere—where, I can hardly say as yet. I own

I have not the fortitude to face a life of complete solitude at Southlands; and I am sending my daughter away to Paris on this day week; I proposed to have the ball on the night before her departure. With that final flare-up we shall disappear as abruptly as we came; having, I hope, done something towards enlivening you all during our stay."

"Hum!—yes; we can't complain of you on that score. And a pretty mess you have made of things, first and last! I should like to know what you mean by it all?"

Mr. Gervis laid his head on one side, and surveyed the old lady with his bland interrogative smile.

"Now it is no use your putting on that face," said my grandmother, nodding at him in a resolute manner, "because you can't intimidate me, and I intend to have it out with you before you leave."

"With all my heart, dear Mrs. Knowles. Shall we have it out now?"

My grandmother looked at me a little dubiously. I am sorry to say that she has a poor opinion of my discretion. I got up at once; but Mr. Gervis arrested me with a deprecatory gesture.

"My dear sir, pray do not stir. We are not going to talk secrets; and I have some hope that your presence may induce your grandmother to spare me as far as her conscience will allow her. Perhaps I may be permitted to urge, as an additional plea in favor of clemency, that I have had to suffer many things at the hands of various ladies during the last few days."

"Serve you right!" cried Mrs. Knowles, pitilessly.

"Very likely; but if you had seen Lady Croft in—shall we say the tantrums?—for three hours together at a stretch, you might possibly admit that I have done a fair amount of penance. Miss Potts, too, when brought to bay, has a marvelous flow of language at command. You were asking what I meant by it all, which is, I presume, tantamount to asking what I mean by declining to sanction an engagement between my daughter and young Croft."

Mrs. Knowles nodded as before.

"Well, I have not the slightest objection to telling you. You will probably disbelieve me; but that is not my fault. If you, and other people choose to set up a theory that the race of monsters is not extinct, I can't help it. I am not a chimera; I don't rampage about the world, gobbling up fair youths and tender maidens, and exulting over their dying agonies; I am nothing more extraordinary than a perplexed nineteenth-century father, with notions of duty—expediency—whatever you like to call it. You consider me devoid of all natural affection; and there you are certainly right. Nevertheless, I have an

idea that nature intended the experience of parents to serve as a protection to their children; and my experience teaches me that people who rush off helter-skelter to get married for no other reason than that they happen to have fallen in love with one another usually have reason to repent of their bargain in a surprisingly short time. That has been my chief reason for acting in the way that has caused so much disturbance. Another, and a less important one, is that, when the Princess left England, I gave her a sort of half-promise that on Geneviève's return to her protection she should be unhampered by any matrimonial engagement. There is yet a third, which I mention with all diffidence; namely, that I do not remember to have ever come across a couple more ill-suited by tastes and habits to spend their lives together than these two. Taking all this into consideration, I refused to entertain Croft's proposal. You may imagine the distressing scenes that ensued, and the hard words with which I was pelted from all sides. But the heat of the struggle is over now, and, with the exception of Lady Croft, who, I am sorry to say, is still very angry, we are all tolerably good friends. There is to be no engagement; but the young people (of course) are going to remain faithful to one another through thick and thin; and in two years, when Geneviève will have attained her majority, they will be free to renew their vows, if they are still so inclined. Time and absence will thus have full opportunity of doing their work. If our young friends rise superior to them, they will only have sacrificed twenty-four months of beatitude, which, terrible as it is, will be no great matter to look back upon. If, on the other hand, they change their minds, how thankful they will be to me for having, in the plenitude of my wisdom, saved them from a lifetime of repentance! And now, my dear Mrs. Knowles, you have heard all about it."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Knowles; "and do you know what the upshot of this will be?"

"Not in the least. Do you?"

"Why, yes. You will have another elopement from your house before you are much older."

"I think not. Geneviève is a minor, you must bear in mind. Moreover, the apples of the Hesperides were not more safe than she will be under the dragon-eyes of Potts."

"Well, well!" sighed my grandmother, somewhat softened; "you may be right, or you may be wrong; I don't set myself up to judge. But one thing is clear: you have broken up your home, and turned your children against you. I will go so far as to say I am sorry for you, Vincent Gervis."

"Why? You would not be sorry if you knew how exactly

things have fallen out in accordance with my wishes. I didn't want the girl to marry in haste; I didn't want to marry her out of hand to an Englishman; still less did I want the Princess to marry her to some dubious sort of foreigner. The situation is precisely what I should have chosen. Once she is established in Paris, the Princess will take very good care that she does not see much of Master Freddy; she herself, being of a somewhat contrary disposition, will refuse to look at any of her stepmother's *protégés*; and I, like a guardian angel, shall hover round, watching the progress of affairs, and perhaps keeping my eye upon some more suitable candidate, should any such turn up in the nick of time. For, between ourselves, I have no great belief in the amiable Frederick's tenacity of purpose."

"Do you mean me to understand, then, that all this is a prearranged plot?" asked my grandmother, in some surprise.

"Heaven forbid! I never attempt to guide events; I only shape my conduct in accordance with them. I may claim for myself that I foresaw probabilities; nothing more. And now, since it appears that I am not going to be scolded, may I revert to the business which brought me here, and beg you to tell me how I am to get invitations printed, and my house turned topsy-turvy, and a brilliant ball successfully carried through—all within the space of six days?"

"Tom is your man," said my grandmother, pointing to me. "He is not good for much in the world; but I will say for him that when there is any occasion for rushing about, and planning, and arranging, he is in his element. He prides himself upon what he calls his 'tact,' which is another word for setting folks by the ears and then forcing them into making it up again. He will do the business for you."

Fortified by these credentials, I threw myself energetically into the task before me.

CHAPTER XXIII.

BEACHBOROUGH PERPLEXED.

HERE is a cutting from the *Lynshire County Chronicle*, bearing date 10th December, 187—, which I find among the various documents which have assisted me in piecing together the present narrative:—

"FASHIONABLE BALL AT BEACHBOROUGH.—On Wednesday last a gathering at once select and numerous assembled under the hospitable roof of Vincent Gervis, of Southlands, Esq., where nothing had been neglected that liberal expenditure, refined

taste, and the unwearied exertions of a genial host could do towards insuring the success of what we may perhaps term, without exaggeration, the most sumptuous ball that has taken place in Beachborough or its vicinity for many years past. Among the bevy of noble and distinguished guests who graced the gay scene with their presence we noticed: Viscount Courtney, G.C.B., and Viscountess Courtney, the Earl and Countess of Lynchester, Sir Frederick Croft, Lady and Miss Croft, Mr. and Lady Maria Pilkington, Mr. and Mrs. Knowles, of Stone Hall, Mr. J. G. Pettigrew, M.P., Rear-Admiral, Mrs., and the Misses Bagshawe, Major-General Blair, C.B., and Mrs. Blair, Colonel Heaviside and Officers 121st Light Infantry, Mr. Flemyng, Mr. T. Knowles, etc.

"Words would fail to do justice to the excellence of the arrangements and the careful attention to *minutiæ* which will cause this truly aristocratic *fête* to be long remembered in the neighborhood. Suffice it to say that the magnificent supper was furnished entirely by the well-known Messrs. Provinder & Son, of High Street, Beachborough, while the decorations, which were of an unusually chaste and elegant character, had been committed to the competent hands of Messrs. Curtain, the celebrated firm of local upholsterers. The string band of the 121st Light Infantry was in attendance, and discoursed sweet music, to the entire satisfaction of the dancers, up to an advanced hour on Thursday morning. Dancing was kept up with unflagging spirit from first to last; and had not the season been mid-winter, the revelers, on tearing themselves reluctantly away from the ball-room, would have found their carriages awaiting them in the broad light of day.

"Southlands, the ancestral seat of the Gervis family, which, as many of our readers are aware, received no guests during the lifetime of the late owner, is, we regret to hear, likely to be once more shut up for a lengthened period, as Mr. Gervis proposes to leave home very shortly, and we understand that no date is fixed for his return."

No one will ever know what obstacles had to be surmounted in order to render Mr. Gervis's ball a success, except those upon whom devolved the task of sending out invitations without the help of a visiting list, of drilling recalcitrant servants, spurring on lazy tradesmen, and getting the work of three weeks accomplished in six days. There were social as well as material difficulties; for upon the first blush of the thing, Beachborough was inclined to cavil at the shortness of the invitation, and was by no means clear that it could be accepted consistently with self-respect; and again, personal interviews had to be sought with Lord Courtney and other magnates, whose presence was

indispensable, but who would fain have been excused drives of fifteen and eighteen miles on a winter's night. Howbeit, disinterestedness ultimately reaped its reward in a complete triumph. The great people consented to come; the smaller ones, on hearing of this, unhesitatingly followed their lead; and if my memory does not deceive me, Mrs. Pender was the only person who sent in a refusal.

Doubtless curiosity and a partial knowledge of the peculiar circumstances under which this entertainment had been so hastily decided upon added much zest to the enjoyment of the company. It was amusing to observe how the eyes of each fresh arrival, after taking stock of the multitude of wax candles, and the profusion of floral decorations in the ball-room, roved anxiously hither and thither till they rested upon the silvery locks of Mr. Flemyng, or the jovial countenance of Freddy Croft, and to note the uplifting of eyebrows, and the furtive nudging of elbows that invariably followed. Lynshire was mystified. Only a few weeks before, the county had been thrown into a ferment by the news that the only son of the present entertainer had fled from his father's roof in company with the daughter of a highly-respected neighbor; yet here were the afflicted parents conversing amicably, and contemplating the scene with benevolent smiles. Only a few days before, it had been currently reported that a love-match between the daughter of the house and a popular young baronet had been untimely nipped in the bud; yet yonder the two luckless lovers might be seen waltzing together, apparently in the best of spirits, no man forbidding them. What, in the name of goodness, did it all mean?

No answer to the general inquiry was to be gleaned from the demeanor of Mr. Gervis, whose features expressed nothing but the most placid satisfaction and urbane welcome of his guests. Mr. Gervis, indeed, was pleased to exhibit himself in an entirely new aspect, and may be said to have achieved the principal success of an evening full of successes. His habitual languor of speech and gait had been laid aside for the nonce, and was replaced by a cheerful, unassuming cordiality and an evident desire to please, which surprised and charmed all with whom he was brought in contact. He spoke to everybody, and had somehow discovered exactly the right thing to say to each; he managed to be everywhere, without appearing to exert himself; he found partners for the plain girls and comfortable seats for the matrons, and to high and low alike he contrived to convey the impression that he considered their presence as a favor conferred upon him. Even those who disliked him most were fain to admit that they had never seen finer man-

ners; and in our parts some of us, who are a little behind the age, flatter ourselves that we know what fine manners are. Old Mr. Pettigrew, watching the increasing favor with which the stranger was regarded, grew a little uneasy and fidgety at last, and whispered to a confidential friend that he hoped in Heaven he was not going to be put to the worry and expense of a contested election at his time of life.

But if Mr. Gervis's behavior seemed to cast some doubts upon the accuracy of recent rumors, still more so did that of Geneviève, whose mien it was impossible to reconcile with the despair of a love-lorn maiden. Hitherto Geneviève had found but few admirers in Lynshire, where blue eyes, rosy cheeks, and *bouches en cœur* are mostly held to be the constituent parts of female loveliness; a few persons only had conceded her to be picturesque and interesting-looking. But that night more than one onlooker was heard to affirm roundly that she was nothing less than beautiful. In truth there is no beautifier like happiness; and if it were not happiness that had brought such a strange soft light into those brown eyes and that was expressing itself in every movement of the slim girlish figure—why, appearances must be very deceptive. As for Freddy, nobody had ever seen him looking anything but happy for more than five minutes together; so that his radiant face could not be taken to prove much, except indeed in a negative sense, as evidencing the improbability of anything having occurred to disturb his normal state of contentment with himself and the world at large. Taking one thing with another, the inference drawn on all sides was that there had been some mistake, and that, so far from Sir Frederick's suit having been rejected by Mr. Gervis (which, when you came to think of it, was an unlikely story, after all), this ball had been given as a means of publicly announcing the engagement.

Those who reasoned thus had probably not noticed that one actor who had taken a prominent part in the little domestic drama under consideration was nowhere to be seen. On a sofa in a small and dimly-lighted room, removed from the sights and sounds of revelry in which her shaken nerves unfitted her to take any part, sat Lady Croft, and made her moan.

"I am the most unlucky woman in the whole world; no one *ever* was tried as I am! I am quite accustomed to it—I am sure I don't expect much—I am prepared for disappointment in a hundred forms—but that such a thing as this should happen I *could* not anticipate. Who could? After all the trouble I have taken, after all the encouragement I have had, after seeing everything go so smoothly from beginning to end, to be checkmated at the last moment by that man, who in reality

cares no more for his daughter's happiness than he does for mine! If one could believe in any one's being so wicked, I should say that his sole aim in life was to make others miserable. The only excuse he could give was that his daughter was very young, and that he had learnt by experience that people ought to hesitate a long time before marrying. Of course one knows that he himself doesn't get on with his own wife; but then, as I told him, that is probably entirely his own fault. 'Not a doubt of it,' he answered, as coolly as possible; 'and I should not be surprised if your son failed to get on with *his* wife—also entirely through his own fault.'"

"How impertinent of him!" said Lady Courtney, who, for the time being, was the sorrowing mother's confidant.

"Impertinent is not the word! But that I could forgive; only he is much *worse* than impertinent sometimes. You have no conception of how—how *horrid* that man can make himself. Fancy his telling me in so many words that my selfishness shocked him! Of all things in the world to accuse *me* of selfishness! Not that it matters much what he says or thinks; for I shall never speak to him again after this, if I can avoid it. Freddy declares that he is willing to wait two years, or *any* number of years; but that is absurd. I must begin at once to look out for some one else for him; but I know I shall nowhere find such a dear, good girl as Geneviève. The change she had brought about in my poor boy already was *more* than wonderful. For the last fews weeks he has gone to church regularly once on Sundays, and repeated the responses too; for I heard him. And he has taken to reading a good deal, and he smokes much less, and altogether— But there is an end of it all now." And Lady Croft is compelled to have recourse to her pocket-handkerchief.

"Oh, but you must not despair," said Lady Courtney, who was a good-natured woman, and did not share her husband's antipathy to Freddy. "After all, there are some attachments which survive a separation of two years. I am sure I have heard of many instances in which long engagements have ended happily; and besides—"

"Ah! not in our family," interrupted Lady Croft through her tears. "No Croft ever yet was constant. It is the hereditary taint—oh dear, *why* are people born with hereditary taints!—and they can't help themselves."

"I was going to say that, if the worst came to the worst, Miss Gervis is not absolutely unique. I don't know her myself; but I dare say she is a very charming girl. Still, there are many thousands of other women in England, you know."

"That is just it! There are thousands of others; and some

of them are vulgar, and some are vicious, and some have red hair, and some are married already. It is a great deal too much to hope for that such an occasion as this should come again. No; I know what will happen. He will run away with somebody else's wife, or he will marry some dreadful creature whom I could not speak to, or else he will play fast and loose with half a dozen girls, and never marry at all. As for his living through two long years without an affair of some kind, there is not a chance of that. He may think now that he will, but I know better; and so does that detestable old man."

In this strain Lady Croft went on, refusing to be comforted, and perhaps rather trying the patience of her courteous listener.

But the warnings of this mature Cassandra were poured forth, as has been said, out of ear-shot of the ball-room; and as there was no Miss Pennefather at hand to convey them thither, the impression gained ground that Mr. Gervis's hospitality was intended to celebrate the conclusion of a betrothal.

Admiral Bagshawe, for one, was strongly of this opinion. The Admiral was in high good humor, for he liked, as he said, to see things properly done, and dash him if he had ever tasted better champagne in his life than was to be had in the supper-room. Now it is well known that judging of champagne is mere guess-work until a considerable quantity of it has been swallowed; and the Admiral had conscientiously subjected Mr. Gervis's wine to this crucial test. Towards the end of the evening, therefore, he was ready for anything; and as courage is a quality in which he has never been deficient, his friends were hardly astonished when he proclaimed his intention of beating about the bush no longer, and of going straight to head-quarters for information. The eyes of the little *coterie* to which he had been holding forth were starting out of their heads and their ears were pricked up, as their emissary shouldered his way towards the master of the house, and called out in a loud hearty voice—

"Well, Gervis, I hear we're to congratulate you, eh?"

Mr. Gervis cocked his head on one side, smiled amiably, and said, "Indeed?"

"So they tell me. *I* don't know anything about it; but I'm an old stager, and I can see as far through a brick wall as my neighbors." Here the Admiral's right thumb points backwards over his shoulder to the corner where Freddy and Geneviève are seated, side by side, and his right eye executes a slow and solemn wink. "People say it's a case," quoth he.

"Do they really? But what will not people say! You have been misinformed, my dear Admiral Bagshawe; if a 'case'

means an engagement, there is not a word of truth in what you have heard."

"The deuce there isn't!" ejaculates the Admiral, a trifle discomfited. "Beg pardon, I'm sure. Have I your authority, then, to contradict these reports?"

"By all means do so, if you think it worth while. Delighted to have had the opportunity of setting you right. Is there any other matter connected with myself or my family upon which I can enlighten you?"

"Eh! No; I don't know that there is," answers the Admiral, staring.

"If you should think of anything else later, pray apply to me without hesitation. Nothing is more flattering than these proofs of the ever-watchful interest which our kind friends and neighbors take in us."

And with that Mr. Gervis moves away, leaving the Admiral to return to his consort and announce that, "The old woman was right, by George! There's no engagement."

"I was sure of it," cried Mrs. Bagshawe triumphantly. "And I must say that I think it is rather bad taste on Sir Frederick's part to show himself here after having been treated in such a way."

"I have my own ideas about that,' puts in Major Currie, who is standing beside the lady's chair. "I am not so sure that it is young Croft who has been badly treated. Mind you, this is only conjecture; but I have seen a good deal of him, and a precious slippery customer he is! It would not surprise me to hear that he had never proposed at all, and didn't mean to propose. When I came here this evening, and saw all the money that was being spent by a man who says that he's going clean out of the neighborhood in a day or two, I couldn't help being reminded of my old campaigning days in India. When we found it necessary to fall back—as the best of soldiers sometimes have to do, Mrs. Bagshawe—what used our plan to be? Why, we brought the artillery into play, and kicked up the devil's own dust and smoke, and slipped off under cover of it."

"Oh, Major Currie, what a dreadful expression! Do you really think then—"

But perhaps the reader has had enough of these provincial gaffers and gammers, and may not care for any further report of their tittle-tattle. They were only a set of dull-witted, vulgar people, dwelling in a small circle and busying themselves with small matters, in default of better employment. Perhaps they ought rather to be pitied than blamed in that their lives had to be spent in a little country town, instead of (for in-

stance) in London, where the intellectual horizon is so much wider, where petty cliques have no place, and where such things as prying and backbiting and scandal are so exceedingly rare. I don't know that their gossip did any great harm to anybody. Certainly it was powerless to disturb either Freddy or Geneviève, who looked, and indeed, were, as happy as though no shadow of a two years' separation was hanging over them.

The semi-betrothed couple had, in fact, recovered with marvelous rapidity from the first shock of that blow which had reduced Lady Croft to despair. One of them, upon whose spirits a vague dread of the future had preyed more than she was herself aware of, acknowledged in her heart that two years of suspense and weariness was not too heavy a price to pay for a lifetime of contentment; while the other was of so sanguine a temperament that he could not believe in that long period of probation at all.

"I am like a prisoner who has just been sentenced to fifteen years' penal servitude," said he. "I am removed from the dock looking regularly broken-hearted, don't you know; but all the time I am thinking to myself that if I don't get out on a ticket-of-leave before my sentence has half expired, it's a pity. All I have got to do is to behave myself, so as to get a good character from the governor of the jail—Mr. Gervis, I mean—and to humbug the chaplain—Miss Potts may represent the chaplain—and then it will soon be found out that I am not such a ruffian as I look, after all. Don't you see?"

This graceful parallel was drawn in the seclusion of the conservatory, whither Freddy and his partner had retired at the end of the last waltz on the programme. Dancing was still going on, as echoes of distant music told them; but the guests were leaving fast, and when our lovers had quitted the ball-room, it had been with a consciousness that the time for saying last words had come, and that it might be many months before they would be alone together again.

"The chaplain is gained already," said Geneviève, smiling; "but she has very little to say to it, I am afraid; and as for the jailer—"

The aposiopesis was expressive. But Freddy confidently gave it as his opinion that the jailer would be all right. "He won't stick out for the whole term when he sees that we're in earnest. He'll make it a year, I expect. Anyhow, it isn't as if we were going to say good-by now, and not meet again till the year after next, you know. And of course we shall write to each other constantly."

Geneviève shook her head. "We must not do that. Don't

you remember, he said there was to be no correspondence? And you agreed."

"Did I? If I did it was because I misunderstood him. I never intended to consent to do without letters—oh, I could not possibly live, unless I heard from you sometimes. Of course I shall write at once; and you will answer me, won't you?"

Geneviève sighed. "It would not be any use if you did write to me," she said. "I should not be allowed to have your letter. You know, I shall be living with Varinka all the time, and she would be very angry if she found that we were corresponding. And besides, I should not like her to see what you wrote."

"Do you mean to say that she would open your letters?" exclaimed Freddy, aghast.

"Oh, yes. In England, I know, that is not done; but abroad it is different. Varinka would think she had a perfect right to read any letters addressed to me, and she would be horrified at the idea of my hearing from any young man. She would say it was not *convenable;* and I am not sure that she would not be right."

"Well then, I must live in Paris as much as I can, that's all."

"I am afraid that would not do either. They would never let me see you alone; and don't you think it would seem a little like a breach of faith if you were to follow me? I mean, if we were to meet just as usual, it would be almost the same thing as if we were engaged."

"So we are engaged."

"No;—only in our hearts. *He* said expressly that there was no engagement. Freddy—"

It was the first time that Geneviève had overcome her timidity to the extent of addressing her lover by his Christian name, and never before had that rather undignified diminutive sounded so sweetly in his ears.

"My own!" he whispered.

"Would you mind very much if we did not meet at all till the two years were over?"

"Mind? Good Lord! I should mind it more than anything that I can imagine. Wouldn't you?"

"Yes—in a way. But I could bear it, if I thought it was best; and I do think so. We shall be able to hear of each other in many ways—through Nina, and other people; and I thought perhaps your mother would let me write to her sometimes. Only I am sure it would be wiser for us not to meet, unless it were really quite by accident. I think they would

be much more likely to give in if they saw that being utterly separated made no difference in us. They would believe then that we really cared for one another."

"I suppose that is what Mr. Gervis doubts?"

Geneviève hesitated for a moment. "I suppose so," she said at length, with that constrained intonation which the mention of her father's name always brought into her voice. "But I do not know what it is that he intends or wishes."

"Queer old chap," remarked Freddy, reflectively; "I can't quite make out what he is driving at, I confess."

"He does not choose that any one should make him out. It is his way to obtain what he wants by roundabout means, even when it would be easier and safer to act openly. I am sure he might have prevented Claud's marriage if he had chosen to speak plainly months ago; and he would have given a great deal to prevent it, I believe, for he is really fond of Claud. Me he has never liked nor pretended to like; so I should have thought he would have been thankful for the opportunity of getting me off his hands. He must have some plan or other, I suppose; but it does not much signify what it is, as it is certain to fail, does it?"

"Not a bit. But, Geneviève, if we are to be all this time without ever seeing one another or exchanging a word, and if you meet lots of fellows in Paris—as of course you will do—who are far and away more worthy of being your husband than I can ever be, won't you—don't you think you might—"

"Fall in love with one of them? No; there is not much fear of that," answered Geneviève, with a little soft laugh. She hardly thought the suggestion worthy of a serious reply.

But when Freddy, who was really alarmed at the prophetic picture which his fancy had conjured up, went on to expatiate upon his own many deficiencies and upon the superior mental and physical attractions of those imaginary suitors, imploring her, almost with tears, not to forget him when he should be far away, she grew troubled, and, regardless of what Miss Potts would have called "proper maidenly reserve," caught his hand in both of hers with a quick movement of pain.

"Don't speak like that!" she cried; "you don't know how you hurt me. Oh, have you not understood? If I thought you had not, and that you doubted me, I don't know how I could bear to leave you like this. It is not possible to tell you how I feel, and naturally you cannot know. But just think what you are to me. No one ever loved me but you. There is no one like you—no one so good and kind and thoughtful.

You are the whole world to me, and you always will be. You believe me, don't you?"

The young fellow was a good deal moved. "What have I done to deserve such love?" he was thinking to himself. "Yes," he said aloud; "I believe you." Then, after a long pause, "And you will not doubt me either?"

"Oh no; I never could."

"Because," said Freddy, getting up and moving about uneasily, "I wanted to tell you—it is an awful thing to have to say, but I must say it—that you would have a right to doubt. My life has not been like yours. I wish to Heaven it had been; but it is too late to think of that now. I have been in love, or at least fancied myself in love, with ever so many people. There was that wretched Miss Lambert, whom you saw, and there were others before her. Shall I tell you about them all?"

"No. I don't wan't to hear. How could you help what happened before we met? I love you; I trust you; I am not afraid of your deserting me now. But even if it were so—even if you did not love me any longer, and cared for somebody else, it would make no difference. To the end of my life my heart will belong to you, and to no one but you."

Her father, if he had heard her, might have rejoined, "How can you possibly tell?" Freddy neither said nor thought this; but it crossed his mind that it would be a happy thing for him if he could feel as absolutely sure of himself as she did of them both. For it is not permitted even to the most thoughtless of mortals to have been fickle with impunity; and to talk of letting the dead past bury its dead is only a way of speaking, and perhaps not a very wise way of speaking either.

Howbeit, Freddy felt in his inmost heart that his love for Geneviève was something very different from those bygone philanderings, and that, that being so, there was no real occasion for him to distrust himself. He resumed his seat, and began telling her how, since he had known her, life had acquired a new meaning for him, how he had grown dissatisfied with his old acceptance of the world as a big playground, and how, for her sake, he was trying and would try, to make something better out of his life than he had hitherto cared to attempt.

"I'm awfully stupid, you know," he had the modesty to admit. "Book-learning isn't in my line, and it wouldn't be much good my going in for that sort of thing; but I have a certain amount of money, and there's the property to look after, and all that. I don't see why I shouldn't be of some use in my own small way. Anyhow, I don't mean to let things slide any more."

Geneviève did not quarrel with this unambitious programme. It was sweet to her to think that the man whom she loved was made better by her love—so sweet that she listened to him without noticing how time was going on, and was much surprised when Miss Potts came in, with a rather grave face, to say that everybody had gone away, and that the servants were putting out the lights.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE RUE D'AMSTERDAM AND THE BOULEVARD MALESHERBES.

"DO you think there were ever before two people as happy as we are?"

The speaker was one of the slowly-moving stream of loiterers which flows up and down the Boulevard des Italiens every night of the year, winter and summer alike. In the clear, frosty atmosphere, in the brilliant light that shone from the street-lamps and the glittering shop-windows, he could distinguish every detail of the figure at his side—the fur-trimmed jacket which fitted her so perfectly, the tiny, exquisitely shaped boots, which Paris alone could have produced, the gloved hand resting upon his arm, the charming upturned face, which met his eyes with a merry smile. Perhaps he read the answer to his question there, for he went on, without waiting for any articulate response—

"It is a realized ideal—at least it is something better than that, for I have got all that I ever dreamt of wishing for, and more besides. There is no place left for castle-building. If the reign of the fairies were to begin again, and my own especial fairy-godmother were to appear from round the corner of the rue Louis-le-Grand there all of a sudden, and beg me to command her services, I protest I should have to make the lady a polite bow, and send her about her business. I really don't know what I could find to ask her for."

"A little more money perhaps?"

"Ah, well, a little more money might be a comfortable thing, certainly; and yet I don't know that I should thank her for depriving me of the pleasure of earning it. I am sure I should not, if it were to make any alteration in our way of living. I am absolutely contented; no change could be a change for the better to me. And to think that there are wiseacres going about the world proclaiming that happiness consists only in anticipation and retrospect?"

"People who say such foolish things can never have known

the meaning of freedom and a fourth-floor in Paris. Oh, what good times we have had !—what fun it has all been !"

The fun of it had not yet begun to pall upon Mrs. Claud Gervis. After three months of married life, she could enjoy as keenly as she had done on the first day of her arrival in Paris the mitigated Bohemianism for which the French capital offers so many facilities. She had an almost childish delight in the novelty of her lot; in the newly-acquired right to go where she pleased when she pleased; in the theaters to which economically disposed persons might betake themselves on foot, and where evening toilets were dispensed with; in those little dinners at some restaurant in the Palais Royal or on the boulevards which relieved one of the vulgar cares of housekeeping; in every incident of the bright winter days. For the time being, at all events, these things satisfied her soul. Whether she was prepared to go quite the length that her husband did, and to declare that any conceivable change must be unwelcome to her, may be doubted; but it is certain that her happiness was not, at this time, any less complete than his.

Nor must it be supposed that her joy in life rested solely upon such frivolous bases as those indicated above. There are few women upon whom marriage does not produce at least a temporary change and softening of character; and Nina, somewhat to her own surprise, discovered that a taste for domesticity was beginning to take root in her heart. She had fallen in love with Claud because of his handsome face, because of his devotedness, because he was so unlike the general run of young Englishmen—for half a dozen more or less inconclusive reasons: she had viewed him from an imaginary level rather above than beneath his own, perceiving her advantages over him in the matters of worldly knowledge and experience. But now she saw him with other eyes; and, whether by reason of closer companionship with him, or of the law of Nature which ordains that the woman shall reverence the man, if by any means she can contrive to do so, Mrs. Claud Gervis's attitude towards her husband was approaching every day more nearly to that enjoined by the apostles and approved by the Church. She began to be ambitious that he should make a name for himself as an author; she watched him with furtive admiration as he sat scribbling at his writing-table; and when a famous review accepted an article from his pen she was so gratified by this honor that the circumstance of its bringing no remuneration with it seemed to her hardly worthy of notice. Sometimes she used to think that she could ask nothing better than to live forever this secluded, independ-

ent life, seeking no longer for admiration or attention on her own score, and content to shine in the luster of Claud's reflected glory.

This, however, was hardly more than one of those pretty fancies which will come to idle people dreaming beside a wood fire in the twilight, but which common sense smiles at when daylight comes round again. Nina knew quite well that in due process of time she would have to resume her place in society, to effect a reconciliation between her husband and the head of the family, and to enter upon the fruition of that comfortable income which would doubtless be offered to the young couple, and which would free the pursuit of literature from any debasing taint of a sordid nature. With her own father she had already patched up a peace. Mr. Flemyng, who was too profound a philosopher to cry over spilt milk, and who may also have had a suspicion that his neighbor at Southlands would not prove relentless forever, had written a long and discursive letter, the purport of which was that, though unable to assist the young people pecuniarily, and *both unable and unwilling to pay outstanding bills* (underlined), he was prepared to offer them the solace of his blessing—or whatever one of his enlightened school of thought may have considered equivalent thereto. Mr. Gervis had not shown an equal readiness to adapt himself to circumstances, several dutiful missives having failed to elicit anything in the shape of an answer from him; but this, as Claud said, did not prove much—the governor never answered letters—and Nina had little fear but that she should be able to subjugate him when the proper time should come. She was in no great hurry; her chief wish was that this protracted honeymoon might last as long as it could be made to do—pleasure first, business afterwards. At the bottom of her heart she believed herself to be irresistible; and Claud was quite of the same mind.

And it must be admitted that she was not without warrant in rating her powers of fascination highly. Her beauty was of that order which no Gallic heart can withstand. Since her wedding-day, her career had been one uninterrupted triumph; and from M. l'Hérisson to the railway-guard who had hastened to place a coupé at the service of monsieur and madame—from the concierge in the rue d'Amsterdam, where the newly-married pair had taken up their abode, to the Princess Ouranoff, she had made a facile conquest of all with whom she had been brought into proximity.

Varinka, always prone to be attracted by new faces, and especially by pretty ones, had conceived for Mrs. Claud one of those ardent attachments which, with her, were perpetually

springing into being, and vanishing again, like the easily kindled fireworks which make such a prodigious blaze and sputter for a minute or so, and are gone, leaving nothing but darkness and a gaunt skeleton-frame behind them. Her exultation over the act of mutiny which had upset Mr. Gervis's calculations may not improbably have prepossessed her in favor of her new step-daughter; Nina's easy manners and faultless costume did the rest; and the fickle Princess's latest bosom friend was thrown over without compunction in order that the newcomer might be taught to know her Paris and be taken to the shops where she ought to buy her clothes. It was Varinka who pointed out how far better, more amusing and more economical it would be to dine at a quiet restaurant, where one could get an excellent dinner for five francs a head, than to engage an extravagant cook, who would in all probability lie and thieve, and would certainly impest the air with the noisome fumes of her *gigots-à-l'ail.* The services of one *bonne*, said she, ought to suffice amply for the wants of two people who would require nothing, except tea and coffee, to be prepared upon the premises. If she had her way, she would have planted the little household at the top of a brand-new mansion in the Boulevard Haussman; for a good quarter, she averred, was everything, and it was permissible to save money in any direction rather than in that of house rent; but upon this point Claud was obdurate. He declared that he could not afford to pay a high rent and did not care a straw for being fashionable, and to avoid further discussion, went out forthwith, and signed an agreement which put him into possession of a sunny little set of rooms *au quatrième* in the rue d'Amsterdam, which he and Nina had inspected a few days before, and had considered eligible.

The Princess visited her *protégés* as soon as they were installed in this modest domicile, and, despite its situation, was pleased to pronounce not unfavorably upon it. The rooms seemed airy and bright, she said, darting hither and thither, and peeping through every doorway; the furniture, though old, was not in such bad taste; with the addition of a few *bibelots*, the place might be made quite habitable.

The *bibelots* in question turned out to be of a somewhat substantial kind, including, indeed, such articles as sofas, armchairs, carpets, and curtains. Returning home, one evening, after a long interview with the editor of the review above-mentioned, Claud found them already in his small *salon*, where they had been arranged with commendable rapidity during his absence. His wife and the Princess were seated luxuriously, with their toes on the fender, sipping that straw-colored tea

which the Russians affect, and into which they customarily drop a slice of lemon in lieu of milk. They seemed much diverted at the air of stupefaction with which he stopped short on the threshold, and at the lugubrious voice in which he inquired how all this was to be paid for.

"You ridiculous boy!" cried the Princess. "Who thinks of paying? We ordered these little necessaries from my own upholsterer, a perfectly well-bred man, who would think himself insulted if you talked of payment within the next two or three years."

Claud looked doubtful. "I don't want to have any bills," he said. "I should like to pay ready money for everything that I buy."

At this innocent avowal both ladies laughed with charming heartiness. Ready money indeed!—why, the thing was not only absurd, but literally impossible. How could a man pay his tailor ready money, for instance? How was a woman to pay her dressmaker, when the dressmaker herself could not tell what the cost of executing an order would be until it was carried out? Did he mean to suggest that his wife should purchase her gowns at a ready-made establishment?

Claud protested that he was not guilty of any such enormity. He would fain avoid running into debt; that was all.

"Everybody is in debt," said the Princess cheerfully. "Look at me: I owe for everything I possess—for my carriage, my horses, my bonnets, my gloves—everything! And I assure you that I do not feel myself any the worse."

Claud did not believe her. As a general rule, it was safe to treat Varinka's statements as apocryphal, and those who knew her best might be excused for saying of her, as Talleyrand said of Metternich, "qu'elle mentait toujours et ne trompait jamais." But in this instance, as it happened, she was telling the simple truth. Lavish, generous in a certain semi-barbarous fashion, scattering her money broadcast, without too much regard to the persons who might chance to pick it up, she had long passed in Paris for a woman of great wealth. It was commonly reported that she had silver mines—in the Ural Mountains in Siberia—somewhere beyond civilization's ken—whence a steady stream flowed ever westward to replenish her purse. Such was the impression which prevailed regarding the Princess among people of her own class; inquiries made in other sections of society might have revealed the existence of a somewhat different notion. Her tradesmen, for instance, knew to their cost that it was very seldom convenient to her to pay; and if they continued to serve her, and to content themselves with occasional small installments of the money owing to them, it

was probably because they had ascertained that she had a rich husband in the background, to whom, as a last resource, appeal might he made. Her bankers, again, though they could have shown that the amounts paid in annually to the lady's credit were more than sufficient to justify the scale upon which her establishment was kept up, could also have testified that her account was pretty generally overdrawn. What became of those handsome balances which, making due allowance for depredations, carelessness and extravagance, should have remained to the Princess after the discharge of what may be called her legitimate expenses? A few—a very few only—of her associates might have answered the question by a conjecture. It was well known among the members of a certain set that the Princess was a passionate gambler; but not many could have told what were the stakes for which she and a limited number of her friends of both sexes were wont to play in that pretty little card-room in the Boulevard Malesherbes, where lights were often kept burning until after sunrise. Few and far between were the nights on which this snug apartment was not illuminated. The Princess would hasten thither, on her return from the opera or from a ball, either accompanied or closely followed by sundry choice spirits who shared her tastes; and whether she won or lost at the game, it is certain that she never wearied of it.

Geneviève, in earlier years, used to feel a child's curiosity as to what took place in that Bluebeard's chamber; Miss Potts used sometimes to venture upon a respectful remonstrance against the iniquities of which it was the surmised scene; neither of them was ever permitted to cross its threshold, and it should be set down to the credit of the feather-brained little Princess that, whatever may have been her own vices, she kept them religiously concealed from her step-daughter, and held up before the eyes of the latter a standard of conduct as unexceptionable as her lights enabled her to frame. It was with unfeigned joy that she welcomed Geneviève back to Paris; with even greater delight did she reach the conviction that her charge had returned to her free. For Geneviève was reserved, and did not care to reveal the secrets of her heart to Varinka, merely pledging her word that she was not engaged to the young English baronet about whom she was asked so many questions. Thus reassured, Varinka prepared to extend the right hand of fellowship to Miss Potts, by whom it is needless to say that it was eagerly grasped. Miss Potts was forgiven, embraced, and—cross-examined. Then—for unfortunately the witness was one of the worst hands at keeping her own counsel that ever lived—the true state of affairs was elu-

cidated, and a stormy scene followed. Many recriminations had to be undergone, and not a few tears shed, before Miss Potts could be once more pardoned and the Princess brought to see that no serious mischief had been done as yet.

"Two years—it is a long time! The essential thing is that they should be prevented from holding any sort of communication together for the present; and I will charge myself with that," said the little woman, nodding her head resolutely. "For the rest, at her age one forms fancies and forgets them again without much difficulty. This Englishman has been the first who has made love to her—there you have the explanation of it all. From what you tell me, Potts, there is nothing about him that can leave a lasting impression upon her. What we must seek for is a man whose disposition corresponds in some degree to her own. There is a weak place, or a strong place—I don't know which you would call it—in every one's character, and when once one has found it, one knows where to aim. It is evident that we must make a plunge into the world of amateur musicians."

She began to run over the list of her acquaintance *sotto voce.*

"D'Arblay—perfectly *comme-il-faut*, a little advanced in years perhaps. De Sancy—a divine voice, but no fortune. Jaworisky—what a ridiculous spectacle is a man who plays the flute!—it is enough to kill you with laughing. A good *parti*, however. Boisonnet—de Castelnau—"

"Don't you think," broke in Miss Potts feebly, "that our dear child's happiness should be the chief object?"

The Princess stamped her little foot impatiently. "Potts, you are of a stupidity beyond bearing! Of what then do you suppose that I am thinking? Do I plot and plan, like *him?* Have I anything to gain by marrying Geneviève, and sending her away from me? And if I wish to see her happily established, and at the same time to keep her within reach, is that any great crime? Listen—I have nothing left in the world to care for but her. Rather than make her miserable, I would surrender her to this Englishman to-morrow; but if I can discover a good husband and a happy home for her in Paris, where I can be near her and see her sometimes, I mean to do it. And in saying that, I say no more than any mother would do."

There is no reason to doubt the speaker's honesty. Hers was one of those natures which can fling aside a friend or a lover easily enough, but which cannot endure to be in their turn deserted. She would give herself infinite pains to reconquer the affection of persons for whom she did not in the least

care, if only she suspected that her charms were beginning to pall upon them; and that Geneviève could contemplate with equanimity the prospect of an establishment so far away as the other side of the channel had struck her as a truly shocking thing. Add to this that it was quite true that she was alone in the world, that she did in all sincerity love Geneviève as warmly as she was capable of loving, and that she was well aware that of all her so-called dear friends there was but this one who might be counted upon to stand by her in adversity and prosperity alike.

"It is a refuge against the bad time coming that I wish to prepare for myself," she admitted candidly to Geneviève one evening; and when asked to what bad time she alluded, answered oracularly that it was impossible to read the future, and that disaster was never very far away from any one. "Supposing some great misfortune were to happen to me—supposing I were to find myself forsaken on every side, you would not forbid me your house, would you? You would not shut your door in my face?"

"You know I never would, Varinka. What makes you say such things? If ever I have a house of my own, it shall be your home as long and as often as you like to make it so; and surely you might know me better than to think that I should turn against you at a time when you were in trouble."

"Ah, bah!" returned the Princess, with a short laugh; "a house implies a husband; and husbands are not too fond of providing their wives' relations with homes. I am not exacting to such an unreasonable extent: all I ask is to be allowed to see you from time to time—not to be left quite alone. Promise me that, whatever happens, you will never consent to let me pass entirely out of your life."

The girl promised, wonderingly. She was unable to see any specific reason for so singular a demand; but she knew, or believed she knew, that her father would gladly seize any opportunity that might offer to shake off even the slender tie that still bound him to his wife, and she presumed that it must be some such eventuality as this that Varinka was contemplating. As regarded herself, she would fain have added a hint that the only house over which she could ever exercise sway as a wife would be Croft Manor; that the future offered her but two alternatives—marriage with the man whom she loved, or spinsterhood; and that, consequently, the calling together of young men with long hair and violins under their arms from all quarters of Paris was so much labor lost. But Varinka was so fractious when crossed, and made such long and agitating scenes if she did not get what she wanted, that it seemed

wisest, upon the whole, to keep silence and submit to be bored to death.

It was at this time that the occupants of the *entresol* beneath the Princess's suite of rooms in the Boulevard Malesherbes began to suffer much annoyance from the scraping, twanging and tootling which took place nearly every evening directly over their heads. Varinka, in prosecution of her scheme, had decided upon holding a series of sociable little meetings, during the winter months, for the ostensible object of bringing amateur musicians together. The notion was a disinterested one, since she herself detested instrumental music, not to say music of all kinds, *opéra bouffe* excepted; and it subsequently obtained its just recompense in the complete success of the assemblies, so far as numbers were concerned. They descended upon the Boulevard Malesherbes, those amateurs, like a flight of woodcock in autumn, when the north-west wind is blowing—de Sancy, d'Arblay, Jaworisky with his flute, and a host of others. Some were old frequenters of the Princess's *salons*, some were brought thither for the first time by friends. Varinka smiled upon them all, swallowing her yawns, and congratulated herself upon having at least furnished her step-daughter with a sufficiency of samples of the required genus to choose between; but Geneviève found this society not a little burdensome. After the perfectly natural and unassuming demeanor of Freddy Croft and others like him, these artistic gentlemen, with their waxed mustaches, their long white fingers, their airs and graces and affectations, seemed to her intolerable. The compliments which they showered upon her whenever she took up her violin, failed to please her, and their own performances made her long to stop her ears. For all the time she wanted to be alone, to think about the absent one, to wonder where he was, and what he was doing, and whether he, too, was thinking of her, all those miles away. The ordeal was a harder one than she had expected it to be. The sense of loneliness was strong upon her, and there was no one to whom she could speak upon the subject nearest to her heart; for Varinka was against her, with Nina she had never been able to hit it off, and the loyal Potts considered it her duty both to Mr. Gervis and the Princess to refrain from any sign or hint that might influence her ex-pupil's choice.

There remained Claud, who, to be sure, was warmly on her side, and who had managed to speak a word or two of encouragement to her; but he naturally devoted to his wife all the time that he could spare from his literary labors, and these had latterly claimed a large portion of his days and nights. For it was now well known in the rue d'Amsterdam, in the Boulevard Malesherbes, and elsewhere, that Claud was at work upon

a play—upon *the* play, in point of fact, which was to enchant the public, astound the critics, and start its author upon the high road to fortune and glory. It would have been too much to expect of a man thus pressing towards the distant temple of Fame that he should pause long to condole with a younger sister upon troubles of a sentimental nature.

CHAPTER XXV.

PRIVATE CRITICISM.

OF all forms of composition the dramatic is that which offers the greatest seductions to a tyro who would fain reach celebrity by a short cut, and whom necessity compels to use his art as a profession. Poets sing in the wilderness, and may sing loudly and long before people will turn round to listen to them; of novelists there is a superabundance all the world over, and of these the French reading public has its own favorites, and is not over-ready to recognize the claims of fresh aspirants upon its notice; but the theater, demanding no weary period of apprenticeship, brings the author directly face to face with the audience which he seeks to please, and a successful first effort at a good Parisian house means not only present emoluments, but something like an assured future.

Present emoluments, as Claud was beginning to find out, were highly to be desired in his case. It was all very well to be allowed to contribute occasional sonnets or articles to the *Revue du Monde Littéraire;* but tradesmen's bills, alas! were not to be discharged after this fashion; nor could he flatter himself that a second volume of poems was likely to prove any more remunerative than his first had done. It was, therefore, not unnatural that he should turn his attention to the drama, and ask himself whether there were any good reason why he should fail where others, who certainly had no title to be considered geniuses of the first order, had achieved results at once so brilliant and so lucrative. He had no overweening vanity; he did not imagine himself to be an Augier, a Sardou, or a Dumas *fils;* but, after carefully perusing the works of these famous dramatists, he did venture to conclude that he might, without too much presumption, endeavor to follow in their footsteps. He knew that he had a fair command of language, some powers of conception, and a certain degree of insight into character. He knew, also, that something more than this was required to make a successful playwright; but as to this last essential, experience alone could decide whether he possessed

it or not, and to experience he was resolved to appeal. Accordingly, he laid in a fresh stock of foolscap paper, and set to work.

Nina was greatly pleased when she heard in what direction her husband's commanding talents were about to be utilized. Her dream of self-effacement remained with her still; but she was not one of those who can possess their souls in patience, and she had secretly chafed under the prospect of a long duration of obscurity for Claud. Also that craving for enjoyment and excitement which was part and parcel of her nature had latterly begun to reassert itself, as it was inevitably certain to do in the long run. The theater with its scenic effects both on and off the stage, its visible triumphs and audible plaudits, appeared to provide a safety-valve for instincts of whose strength no one was more conscious than Nina herself.

And here she found a ready sympathizer in the volatile little lady of the Boulevard Malesherbes. Varinka, who had a hundred different ways of occupying her leisure moments, seldom had time or inclination to open a book, and had hardly understood Nina's exultation over the circumstance that Claud had got an unpaid-for article into the *Revue du Monde Littéraire;* but of the stage and the glories connected with it, of first representations and talented authors, in accurate evening dress, bowing their acknowledgments from a private box, she did happen to know something, having scores of times paid highly for the privilege of witnessing such scenes; and on hearing of Claud's aspirations, she at once declared her approval of them and her readiness to do all that lay in her power towards bringing them to a favorable issue. She had a notion that the production of plays was very much a matter of favor —that it was of the greatest importance to a beginner to have some acquaintance with the masters of his craft; and just as, a few weeks before, she had ransacked Paris to find amateur musicians for her step-daughter's benefit, so now she sent out emissaries to all points of the compass in search of eminent literary persons. To some knights of the pen—a fighting journalist, a fashionable novel-writer, a poet who had missed fire—she was able to introduce Claud without delay. These were occasional attendants at the little gambling parties to which allusion has been made, and being all of them anxious above everything to pass for fine gentlemen and dilettanti, were not disposed to dwell much upon the subject of their calling or to encourage a novice with hopes of making money at it. They were very civil; they conversed with Claud upon all kinds of topics, save that of literature, for five minutes or so after their introduction to him; and then, having ascertained that monsieur did not play games of chance, slipped away

towards the little room that we know of, and happened to be looking in the other direction the next evening that they met the embryo dramatist. Soon, however, other men of letters, big fish and little fish, began to drop in at those unceremonious evening assemblies which could hardly be called parties, since no formal invitation was ever sent out for them, but which were often so numerously attended that the street below was blocked with a long line of carriages. The Princess never had any difficulty in filling her rooms. She was not in the least particular as to whom she admitted, and it was an oddly-assorted crowd that came to pay its respects to her twice a week. Scowling refugees from foreign countries rubbed elbows there with the representatives of their several governments; French generals found themselves confronted with warriors from the other side of the Rhine; high political personages, with stars and ribbons and strings of little jeweled orders dangling from brochettes, looked in on their way to some state reception at the Élysée; Englishmen, Americans, Italians, specimens of all the divers nationalities which Paris attracts, were equally welcome to the indiscriminate hospitality of the little lady who had contrived to make herself liked by every one of them. It was whispered that she was in the pay of the Russian government, and was able, through social influences, to furnish information of a most valuable kind to her Embassy; and although there was no truth in the report, it served to invest her with a certain importance in the eyes of some of her guests and in a measure to increase her popularity among them. She did not put herself to much pains to entertain them—nor indeed were such pains called for; for there was an increasing ebb and flow of the stream upon her staircase, few remaining long, and every one going away when he was so minded—but she had the knack of pleasing; she was pretty, lively, clever even, in the sense of being always ready with a reply, and with a smart saying upon occasion; and, above all, she gave herself no airs.

Claud, who wanted his evenings for work, was not a very constant attendant at these gatherings; but it happened that, upon one occasion, when Nina had been dining in the Boulevard Malesherbes, he came in late to fetch her away, and was instantly pounced upon by Varinka, who declared that she had been anxiously awaiting his arrival for more than an hour.

"If you had not appeared, I should never have forgiven you," she cried. "I have some one here to-night whom you must absolutely know. Do you see him over there, talking to the woman in black velvet? That is Poinsot—the great Eugène himself. Come and be presented to him at once."

Claud, as he made his bow, stole a rapid glance at the most successful, if not the greatest of modern French dramatic authors. Eugène Poinsot, whose first play took the Parisians by storm twenty years ago, and whose reputation has done nothing but increase ever since, was a short, stout man, with a good-natured, smooth-shaven face and a shock of black hair, which stood up straight from his forehead, and was but slightly sprinkled with gray. He held out his hand to the young man in a friendly way, and said he was delighted to make the acquaintance of the author of "Par-ci, par-là."

"I have read your verses, monsieur—charming! charming! May we not look for something fresh from your pen before long? When one possesses your talents one has not the right to let them rust."

Claud replied, with a laugh, that the reception accorded by the public to his last volume had sufficiently convinced him that poetry was not his vocation.

"Ah! the public—yes, yes; it is too true. The public is dull and slow to appreciate work that appears under a new name. I do not wonder that you are discouraged. But it is a pity—upon my honor, it is a pity! Is it a fact, as I have been informed, that you have published an English edition of your poems, and that you are a composer in two tongues?"

"That was not a difficult matter," Claud answered modestly. "I was taught both English and French as a child; I have spoken the one language as much as the other all my life, and now I hardly know which to call my own."

"But it is a phenomenon—a veritable phenomenon! The man who has command of two languages to the extent of being able to write and speak as readily in the one as in the other is twice over a man. You should have a great future before you, monsieur."

Not until long afterwards did Claud discover that it was this civil-spoken gentleman's unvarying rule to laud his *confrères* to the skies. Poinsot admitted as much to him when their acquaintance was one of several years' standing, by which time circumstances had enabled Claud to hear the confession without danger of wounded self-love. "I am obliged to say something about his works to a man who has written; he would never forgive me if I were to keep silence; and it is easier and pleasanter to praise than to criticise. Naturally, one result of my method is that I have been more or less found out, and that my good word does not count for much. Another is that I pass for the most good-natured man in France, and that those who profess to laugh the most at my verdicts and by accepting a good part of them, as applied to their own

writings. The generality of men are nothing but big children, who prefer sweetmeats, which cannot do them any good and may make them ill, to the black draught which their health requires."

It is certain that Claud swallowed the first installment of M. Poinsot's sweetmeats with no small gusto. Modesty and gratification combined prevented him from returning any very coherent reply. He murmured something about *laudari a laudato*, and expressed a hope that if, in his next effort, he should be tempted into essaying another form of composition, he might be equally fortunate in earning M. Poinsot's approval.

"Count upon it in advance," cried the great man, without intentional irony. "*Apropos*, it has been whispered to me that you are engaged upon a comedy. That is so? Come—so much the better! It is needless for me to tell you that plays, like all other things in this world, stand or fall by their own merits; but there are ways in which an old hand at the trade may help a young one. Command me, if at any time you should think I could be of service to you." He waved Claud's expression of gratitude airily aside with an outward sweep of his large white hand. "Thank me when I shall have done something to deserve your thanks," quoth he magnanimously.

It was not, in truth, without reason that Eugène Poinsot was accounted the most good-natured man in France. Having been blessed all his life with good fortune and a robust digestion, he had no cause for feeling otherwise than kindly towards his fellow-men. His joyous nature delighted in the environment of happy faces; and if when some poor devil of his acquaintance fell upon evil times, he preferred sending him money to visiting him, it was only because he could not endure the sight of misery. His friendliness towards Claud arose, no doubt, in a measure, out of sheer kindness of heart: it is also possible that, being a martyr to feminine fascinations, he may have been anxious to do the charming Princess Ouranoff a good turn: lastly, his praise of our hero's poems had not been altogether insincere. He had detected in them a felicity of expression, and, every now and again, a touch of original thought, which had seemed to hold out hopes of better things for the future; and indeed it may as well be stated here that, despite the coldness of its first reception, the French edition of Claud's work has, in these latter days, attained a sale which, according to the humble notions of some of his friends, is somewhat out of proportion to its deserts.

Poinsot, then, took our young author in hand, and proved himself in the sequel to be no despicable ally. He introduced him into a fashionable club; he made him acquainted with a

larger circle of literary men than were at the Princess's beck and call; finally, he took him, one day, to the Théâtre du Colisée, and presented him to M. Leroux, the director, a melancholy-looking personage upon whom the announcement that M. Poinsot's friend was a poet, and would shortly have a piece to submit to the Parisian public, did not seem to produce any pleasurable impression.

"Not a piece in verse, I hope," said M. Leroux.

Claud hastened to reassure him by stating that his piece would be in prose, and in the most modern of prose. It was nothing more than a drama of every-day life that he had undertaken, he said.

"Ah!" M. Leroux did not presume to dictate; but perhaps he might be permitted to say that there were certain points to be kept in mind by every one who undertook to write dramas relating to every-day life, and that neglect of any one of them was apt to prove fatal. "Draw as much as possible from the life, monsieur; avoid intricacy of plot; emphasize details; above all, steer clear of fine phrases. If you will do me the honor to forward me your piece, when finished, I will promise you to consider it carefully; and by paying attention to the points which I have taken the liberty of bringing to your notice, you may succeed in producing something which will take the fancy of the public. As for me, I shall esteem myself happy, should it be in my power to oblige a friend of M. Poinsot's."

Such a success as the manager prognosticated certainly did not seem to be beyond the reach of a moderate ambition. "He is no enthusiast, this good Leroux," remarked Poinsot, getting up, with a laugh. "One soon ceases to be so in his trade. No matter!—he is not the less eager to secure a good play when he has the chance."

With that Mentor and Telemachus took their leave, M. Leroux accompanying them to the door, and reiterating, as a last word of warning, "Above all, monsieur, no fine phrases!"

If the taking of infinite pains be the most certain means of attaining a desired end, the prospects of Claud's play should have been reassuring. Mindful of M. Leroux's advice, he studied carefully from the life, spending hours in society which was not much to his taste for the sake of familiarizing himself with the tendency of thought and turns of speech common among the people whom he wished to depict; he resolutely eliminated, both from his plot and his dialogue, all that seemed to savor ever so slightly of extravagance; he pondered over each sentence, and did not hesitate to sacrifice the work of days if, upon reperusal, it struck him as unsatisfactory. It was

a weary task; but he faced it patiently, feeling that its importance as bearing upon his future could not be overrated.

In the mean time all this pre-occupation was little by little bringing the death-blow to the idyllic life of the rue d'Amsterdam. Claud and Nina were experiencing the common lot of mankind—

> "Die Leidenschaft flieht,
> Die Liebe muss bleiben;
> Die Blume verblüht,
> Die Frucht muss treiben—"

They had reached that period of their life's voyage in which so many make shipwreck; that time of trial in which fancy—poor, pretty fancy, which has little to do with a work-a-day world like this—has to be purged away, that it may be seen whether love lies beneath or no; and if one of them was unconscious that he was passing through any crisis, the other recognized it plainly enough. From the nature of the case it must always be the woman who suffers most from this sort of inevitable awakening, this dismal discovery that—

> "Love—at least this love of one for one—
> Is, at the best, not all beneath the sun—"

The husband has other things to think of; business to attend to; work—or pleasure, elevated to the rank of work—which takes him out into the world, and keeps him engaged. It is the wife who must sit at home and think sadly of the golden days of idleness gone, never to return.

Now, if there was one occupation for which Mrs. Claud Gervis was less qualified by nature than another, it was precisely that of sitting at home and mourning. When she realized that playtime was over; that there were to be no more snug little dinners on the Boulevard (for this hand-to-mouth kind of life had been found incompatible with the exigencies of mental labor, and a cook had been engaged for the young couple); no more pleasant days spent in dawdling among the trees of Saint-Germain or along the alleys of Versailles—when, in a word, she found that her dream had melted into thin air, after the manner of dreams, she accepted the changed order of things without outward repining, and determined to seek such legitimate amusements as lay within her reach, rather than spend long, solitary hours in grieving over the inevitable. It was some consolation to her to feel that the disillusion which she had foreseen from the first, and of which she had warned Claud in the autumn woods long ago, was coming through no fault of hers. She was not so foolish as to remind him of her prophecy or to point out its approaching fulfillment. When

Claud looked up from his writing to say what good times they would have when the spring came round again and his task was done—when he sketched out some vague plan for spending the summer in the depths of the forest of Fontainebleau, and declared that, if this first effort of his should turn out well, he would give himself a holiday of at least six weeks, she smiled, and did not contradict him. But she knew full well that no forest solitudes would ever see her and her husband alone together again. And was it not a fact full of significance that he never raised the faintest objection to her entering society under the Princess's wing, to her attending balls, concerts and receptions evening after evening, and returning home in the gray light of dawn? He seemed quite contented to hear descriptions of all these brilliant entertainments the next day, and to feel no sort of regret at being precluded from taking part in them himself.

The truth is that Nina led a bright and merry existence during those winter months, and only lamented the loss of the ideal life at intervals. The Paris of the Parisians pleased her no less than that out-door Paris which offers so smiling a welcome to strangers had done; and the liking was reciprocal. At the gatherings to which she was taken almost every night by the Princess she was even more surrounded than was that popular lady herself. Her dress, her manners, everything about her—even to her English accent—were pronounced charming; her only defect was that she had a husband. "*Et encore!*"—as the Princess whispered, behind her fan, to one of her own admirers.

There was no rivalry between these ladies. Each had her own circle of slaves; their different styles of beauty rendered them excellent foils to one another; and Varinka, with her white skin and childish face, had no need to be jealous of Nina's advantage over her in point of youth. The two of them entirely eclipsed Geneviève—who, for that matter, was quite content to be eclipsed. The society which Mrs. Gervis found so agreeable failed to attract her; she drew odious comparisons between the fatuous, faultlessly got-up young gentlemen who were its chief ornaments, and their less polished but more human equivalents on the other side of the channel; and her best evenings were those on which she was allowed to remain at home with Miss Potts, while the others drove away to display their pretty faces and their fresh toilets at half a dozen different houses. It was then that the violin was taken out of its case, and strange fantasias, such as the Princess's musical friends had never been privileged to listen to, were performed.

Late one afternoon, in the twilight hour before dinner-time, the four persons above mentioned were sitting round a cheerful fire. Varinka and Nina, gloved and bonneted, their furs flung back from their shoulders, were morally vivisecting the ladies whom they had found at home in the course of a round of ceremonious visits. Geneviève, gazing dreamily at the glowing logs, took no part in the conversation, which only reached her ears by snatches. Miss Potts, bolt upright in her chair, was equally silent. Miss Potts seldom opened her lips in the presence of Mrs. Gervis, of whom she strongly disapproved, not more on account of her scandalous behavior in eloping from her father's house than of her present apparent negligence of a wife's domestic duties. Presently the click of a closing door was heard from the other end of the room, and a man's figure, dark and shadowy in that half-light, was seen advancing, hat in hand, across the thick carpet. The Princess rose; and then, as the new-comer drew near enough to be recognized, she uttered a little shriek. "You!"

"Myself, madame. The Marseilles express brought me here this morning, and, as you see, I have lost no time in reporting my arrival to you."

Geneviève fancied that she had heard the voice before, but the firelight did not reach to the height of the speaker's face; and a long gray overcoat and trousers of the same color terminating in a very neat little pair of shiny leather boots, might have belonged to anybody.

"I have left—" he resumed; but here he was interrupted by a prolonged fit of coughing, which forced him to sink down into the nearest chair, and then the features of M. Hirsch became plainly visible. "I apologize most humbly for making such a horrible noise," said he faintly, as soon as he was able to speak. "I can only beg you to believe that I do not do it for pleasure. For the last week my life has been one long apology, for I have scarcely ceased coughing from morning to night."

"And you have left the south in that state! What imprudence!" ejaculated the Princess.

"Dear madame, you are aware that prudence has never been one of my numerous virtues. But is not that Miss Gervis whom I see?"

Geneviève got up, and shook hands with the man whom she had met last in such evil case. Fortune had smiled upon M. Hirsch since then, seemingly; for he was well dressed, a large turquoise ornamented his little finger, and the stick upon which he leant was mounted in gold.

"What! you are already acquainted?" exclaimed Varinka

And then—"Ah, to be sure. What am I thinking of? I had forgotten."

There was a short pause. "Mademoiselle was very good to me when I was in England," said M. Hirsch gravely. "I have not forgotten her kindness."

Then came another rather uncomfortable pause; after which Geneviève for want of something better to say, remarked, "You have come from the south?"

"From Nice, mademoiselle."

"Which you ought never to have left," put in the Princess, reproachfully.

"Which circumstances have compelled me to leave. Nice is a delightful residence. One breathes a balmy air there; one has a sea which is always blue, a sun which is always warm, a cosmopolitan society—all that the heart of man can desire. Unhappily, the place has one fatal drawback; it is situated within a short and easy journey of the principality of Monaco."

"Ah!"

It was from Varinka's lips that this pregnant monosyllable fell.

Hirsch turned towards her with raised shoulders and hands outspread. "Alas! madame, the old story! I have never had any luck in my life."

"You have not broken the bank, then?" asked Varinka carelessly. But it struck Geneviève that her voice was a trifle tremulous.

"On the contrary, madame; the bank has broken me. A complete defeat all along the line! Cleaned out, my dear lady—empty!"—here he made as though he would turn his pockets inside out—"literally empty!" Another violent coughing-fit interrupted him. "Being unable to live down there without playing," he went on, "and being unable to play without money, I have returned to Paris, which is as good a place to die in as another. I have returned to die at your feet, madame," he added, turning to Varinka with a bow and a grin. The man's sunken cheeks and wasted form added such emphasis to this ghastly pleasantry that Nina, for one, began to find the situation unbearable. It seemed to her by no means impossible that he might carry out his threat, and die there and then. She jumped up, and withdrew after bidding everybody a hasty good night. Not, however, before M. Hirsch had expressed a polite desire to renew his acquaintance with her husband. "Of whose growing celebrity as an author," said he, "I have heard a great deal. We are not left altogether without the news of the day at Nice; and it will be a great satisfaction to me if I am able to assist at the production

of Mr. Gervis's first play, and to add my small tribute to the general applause."

To judge by his looks, he was not likely to be present at that, or any other earthly scene in three months' time, which was the earliest date at which Claud anticipated that his piece could be put upon the stage. Nina went home, and reported to her husband that that ragged man who had appeared at Southlands in the summer had turned up again, decently clothed, this time, but penniless and in the last stage of consumption, and that she really believed he had only come to Paris to entreat the Princess to give him decent burial.

Subsequently, however, it appeared that M. Hirsch was neither so ill nor so destitute as he had represented himself to be. He continued to cough in a most distressing manner, but he did not seem to draw nearer to death; while that he had still some means left was sufficiently proved by his engaging rooms at an expensive hotel and setting up a hired brougham, in which he had himself driven regularly once, and sometimes twice a day to the Boulevard Malesherbes. Before he had been ten days in Paris he had become a recognized appendage of the Princess's household, where no one any longer treated him as a visitor or thought it necessary to entertain him. He had his own chair by the fireside; and there he would often sit, alone and idle, the whole afternoon through, his wasted hands lying loosely clasped upon his knee and his little colorless eyes blinking at the flames. At such times he had a patient, submissive look which lent a touch of pathos to his rather ignoble cast of countenance. Geneviève, who came in, once or twice, and found him sitting thus all by himself, felt her heart moved with pity for the friendless man, and used to say a kind word or two to him, for which he was almost ridiculously grateful. She thought him much changed for the better since the summer. Certain things there were about him, it was true, which were not susceptible of alteration or improvement—such were his sharp, wolf-like teeth, his shallow eyes, and the abnormally-shaped skull which Providence had seen fit to place upon his shoulders—but respectable clothing did something for him; and to Geneviève at least his manner was always gentle and respectful. Towards others he bore himself less amiably. It was as though he had learnt that the world was against him, and being too worn out to fight any longer, showed his contempt for the hostility of mankind by a perpetual veiled sneer, which made itself felt even in his most ordinary and civil phrases. Hence he was tolerated, rather than liked, in the small circle into which he had chosen to intrude, and Vafinka, though affecting to treat him as an old friend, was ob-

viously ill at ease in his presence, and lost no opportunity of urging him to return to a climate better suited to his state of health.

She had a disconnected, mysterious story ready to satisfy the curiosity of those who made inquiries about him. She had known him from her childhood. He belonged to a noble Russian family—he had had misfortunes. For the rest, an excellent, worthy man; but (raising her finger to her forehead) a little touched on the question of politics. "He took it into his head to advocate democratic principles; and with us, you understand, when a man adopts democratic principles— You would be astonished if I were to tell you how many members of our highest families are wandering about the world now under assumed names. But it is not well to chatter overmuch about such things. For my part, I love my fellow-countrymen wherever I find them, and I do not ask whether their opinions are the same as my own. I should be more than ashamed of myself if I were to turn the cold shoulder to one whom I have known all my life because he is no longer what he once was."

This language was felt to be highly creditable to the Princess, who, indeed, had ever professed (whether sincerely or not no one knew, and it did not greatly signify) a somewhat ostentatious sympathy with oppressed patriots and a readiness to throw open her doors to the victims of despotism.

M. Hirsch, then, was accepted as a necessary incubus; and if he was sometimes a little in the way during the daylight hours, it might be set against that that he was always ready to take a hand at baccarat, when evening came, and to lose his money without a frown. One thing was clear; that he had no intention of moving from Paris.

The days and weeks passed on; winter gave place to the cold winds and showers and sunshine of spring; the chestnut-trees in the gardens of the Tuileries put forth their leaves; and at last, one fine morning, when Nina was standing in her drawing-room, superintending the arrangement of a small cart-load of plants which she had purchased in the flower-market by the Madeleine, Claud marched in, with a triumphant mien, and, dashing down a pile of manuscript upon the table, cried, "It is done!"

It was done. The play upon which so many anxious hours of labor had been spent, which had been altered, corrected and revised with hopes and misgivings known only to its author, lay there, finished at length and neatly copied out, and big with the fate of the two innocents who stood looking at it. Nina felt her breath coming quickly as she gazed at that insensible

heap of closely-written sheets upon the destiny of which such weighty issues depended.

"Are you satisfied with it?" she asked eagerly. "Do you think it is good?"

Claud shook his head. "I haven't the most distant idea. I have pored over the wretched thing till I know every word of it by heart; and now I can no more judge of it than I could of a piece that I had never seen. Sometimes I think it will go down; sometimes I am convinced that it is the very dullest stuff that ever was written. Well, we shall be put out of our pain to some extent before to-morrow morning. Varinka has promised me the use of her drawing-room this evening to read it to a score or so of people; and if they report favorably upon it, there will be that much gained."

It was M. Poinsot who had insisted upon this preliminary ordeal, which Claud, for his part, would gladly have dispensed with. "It will give you courage," the elder man had said. "Afterwards you will have to read your work to a less friendly audience, and you will not do it the worse if you are free from nervousness and have the echoes of a *bravo* or two in your ears."

That some guarantee against nervousness was called for Claud himself was forced to confess not many hours later. He has since assured his present biographer that never in all his life has he experienced anything like the sickening sense of discomfiture and dismay that fell upon him when he seated himself at the little table in the Princess's drawing-room, upon which a pair of candles, a glass of water and the famous play had been placed in readiness for him. And yet it was not a very formidable audience that he was asked to face. Poinsot, smiling encouragement from his arm-chair in the front rank beside the Princess; Geneviève, Nina, and a sprinkling of other ladies; a couple of celebrated authors, whose sympathy might be supposed to be quickened by their own memories of the agony attendant upon a first plunge; the fire-eating journalist of whom mention has been made; a few literary stars of the fourth or fifth magnitude, and a ruck composed of the gilded youth which frequented the house—all these were well-disposed towards the beginner, and asked for nothing better than to be given an opportunity of testifying their good-will. But in truth it was not so much of them as of the sound of his own voice that Claud was afraid. However, there was no possibility of drawing back at that advanced stage of the proceedings, so he gulped down half his glass of water, dropped his head on to his hands, and fixing his eyes upon the MS., began: "*Amour et Amitié: drame en cinq actes*," proceeding with the list of the *dramatis personæ*.

Here is the Argument, as forwarded to me in a letter which I received from Claud about this time.

"Georges and Victor de Sancerre, cousins and fellow-collegians, celebrate their simultaneous entry upon life in Paris by vows of an eternal friendship, which is not disturbed, in the sequel, by the circumstance that they are both secretly enamored of Eugénie Delacroix, the playmate of their youth, who has just emerged from her convent, and who is (of course) everything that could be desired in the way of beauty and innocence. The choice of the young lady, and of her parents, falls immediately upon Georges, who has advantages in the way of fortune and good looks which are denied to Victor. The latter, successfully concealing his chagrin and his unsuspected attachment, attends the wedding ceremony, says all the fine things that are expected of friends on such occasions, and magnanimously resolves to do violence to his feelings by remaining a constant spectator of the happiness of the young couple and acting as a jealous guardian of the same. For this Victor, you must understand, is a sober fellow, and knowing his cousin's instability of character, perceives how necessary it may become that he should have a mentor at his elbow. Georges is in due course carried away by the current of Parisian society, begins to neglect his wife, and finally falls under the dominion of Blanche, Comtesse de Charolles, who is the wicked woman of the tale, and whose charms and iniquities you will please to imagine as limitless. Eugénie, disconsolate and forsaken, finds her sole solace in the respectful sympathy of Victor, whose efforts to reclaim the erring Georges have only resulted in bringing about a coolness between the two friends. Accidentally discovering at the same moment Victor's long-hidden love and her husband's infidelity, she throws herself into the arms of the former, implores his pardon for all the pain that she has caused him, and entreats him, in the most eloquent language, to take her away from her misery. Victor, upon this, comes out very strong indeed. After a prolonged and desperate struggle with himself—'No,' says he; 'I renounce all that you offer me for three good reasons. You love your husband; you do not love me; and I—I love you both!' Now, in the midst of this affecting scene, at the very moment when Victor is imprinting his first kiss—the kiss of renunciation, you know—upon Eugénie's forehead, who should come striding in but Georges himself? Madame de Charolles has, all this time, been quieting the troublesome conscience of her lover by insinuating doubts as to the fidelity of his wife and his friend; and it is through a wily stratagem of hers that he is enabled to arrive just in the nick of time, and to obtain this convincing

proof of their treachery. Recriminations, threats—finally, explanations, and pardon of the repentant and remorseful Georges. Victor, deprived at one blow both of the love and of the friendship which had made his life endurable, announces his speedy departure for the deadly climate of Sénégal, and is about to retire, when Eugénie stops him. 'Stay with us,' she cries; 'what have you, or we, to fear? You have shown that with you friendship and duty are stronger even than love. Stay—to be the good genius of my husband, the guardian angel of the home which you have restored to us. Stay till we have found you a wife more worthy of you than I could ever have been.' And Georges chimes in with, 'Yes, my friend; I ask of you this last sacrifice.' Whereupon, down comes the curtain."

It will be at once surmised, from the above bare outline, that the author must have based his hopes rather upon incident and dialogue than upon strength of plot. Such was in fact the case; and in so doing, Claud had chosen advisedly. He had intended that the chief figure upon his canvas should be that of Madame de Charolles, and his object had been to represent in her a type of that absolute profligacy which has contrived in our day to co-exist with refinement and an unexceptionable bearing—a woman with neither heart nor conscience, yet one in whom the inherent ugliness of vice was so softened down as to be perceptible only in its consequences. The other characters in the play were rendered entirely subsidiary to this one, upon which the author had expended an infinity of pains, determining to exaggerate nothing by so much as a hair's breadth, and at the same time to miss no single point that might serve to throw it out into clearer relief. The whole composition was a study, rather than a drama; and as such, it had, no doubt, considerable merit. The only question was whether the study were a sufficiently original and powerful one to hold its own with no other support than a single strong situation and that rigid realism of detail so dear to the modern play-going public.

Claud's limited audience, which, small as it was, was heterogeneous enough in its composition to afford some clew to the probable decision of a larger assembly, responded enthusiastically in the affirmative. The applause, to be sure, did not always come exactly at the moment when the author expected and coveted it; but the important point was that it came, and that it was evidently spontaneous and genuine. When the reader had brought his task to an end, he was immediately surrounded, and gratified with such a shower of compliments that he was almost stunned by them, and hardly knew whether he was standing on his head or his heels.

"Magnificent!"—"Sublime!"—"It is truth itself. Ah, that

diablesse de Charolles! I recognized her from the first words." "So did I. The portrait is unmistakable. I used to see a great deal of her once."

They had all seen her. And yet, Heaven knows that she was imaginary; and even very imaginary. It would have required a far more conceited man than our modest hero to be able to listen long to this kind of thing with complacency. He was glad to think that his first step had been attended with success; he was grateful to his critics for their praise; but it was no small relief to him when they began to show signs of exhaustion. Then he remembered, with some uneasiness, that M. Poinsot's voice had not made itself heard in the chorus. That gentleman, however, took an early opportunity of explaining his silence.

"I wanted to leave the verdict to them," he said. "If I had given them a lead, they would have followed me, like so many geese on a common. I congratulate you, my friend. I think your play will do. You are no longer afraid of facing Leroux, eh? Did I not tell you how it would be?"

And shortly afterwards M. Poinsot, who at that moment was refreshing himself with a slice of *galantine* and a glass of wine, was observed to laugh under his breath, as at some diverting reminiscence.

"Why do you laugh?" asked Claud, suspiciously.

"I was thinking of your Victor. What a good fellow! what a loyal consoler of the afflicted! Only, if I had been in his place—"

"You would have spoilt my drama," said Claud, laughing too. "Don't be afraid; if ever I put you into a play, you shall not be exposed to Victor's temptations."

And truly those who are acquainted with M. Poinsot are aware that, though he knows the meaning of friendship as well as most men, his conception of the sentiment would hardly be likely to carry him to such extreme lengths as were attained by Claud's immaculate hero.

CHAPTER XXVI.

PUBLIC CRITICISM.

ONE sunny May morning the posters at the entrance of the Théâtre du Colisée, and the fifty—more or less—daily newspapers with which Paris is blessed, announced the first representation of an entirely new drama, entitled *Amour et Amitié*. Many of the newspapers had for some time previously

been preparing their readers for this intelligence by letting fall sundry hints as to the plot of the piece which M. Leroux was understood to have in preparation, by describing the various toilets which Mdlle. Thoméry, to whom the chief *rôle* had been assigned, had ordered of her dressmaker for the occasion, and by imparting such information as could be gleaned with reference to the young and gifted Englishman who was about to enter the ranks of French authors. It was Varinka who, through the medium of her bellicose journalist, had thus helped the coming event to cast its shadow before it. Claud himself had little fancy for such devices; but more experienced persons differed from him, and unquestionably the curiosity of the public was excited, and the interest of the play in so far served, by the premature disclosure of the author's nationality. The strange phenomenon of a French play written by an Englishman naturally took the fancy of the Parisians, who have been compared before now to the Athenians of St. Paul's day; and doubtless the novelty of the attraction offered acted as a stimlus to the sale of tickets for *Amour et Amitié*, which, on this last day, found ready purchasers at four and five times their authorized price. Everybody who was anybody had secured a place at the Colisée for this important evening.

"It is a success before the event!" cried the optimist Poinsot enthusiastically.

Claud, for his part, was far from being equally sanguine. The weeks which had elapsed between the formal acceptance of his piece and its production had been little else than a prolonged martyrdom for him. Released from the labor of composition, which had hitherto kept his time and thoughts occupied, he had had leisure to indulge in the alternating fits of hope and despondency which commonly beset those who are committed to a doubtful enterprise, and to experience all the feverish miseries of suspense.

M. Leroux, whose impassive melancholy was not to be dissipated by anything short of accomplished facts, had administered to him something more than an antidote to the unmeasured eulogies of the Princess's guests.

"When all is said, monsieur," the manager had observed, "it is neither you, nor I, nor our friend M. Poinsot there who will deliver judgment upon you, but the public; and I, who have served the public for five-and-twenty years, have reason to know that it is a capricious master. I have seen it reject works of high merit, and acclaim rubbish which I blushed to put upon my stage. For myself, I think well of your piece, as I have proved to you by accepting it; but I answer for nothing. My advice to you is not to be over-elated, if it succeeds, nor

too much cast down, if it fails. In the latter case, you will have the consolation of thinking that you are not alone in misfortune; for, after all, it would be upon me that the expense of a failure would fall."

These words of cold comfort rang continually in Claud's ears, and effectually robbed other and more encouraging utterances of their sweetness. There were days when it was pain and grief to him to hear his play mentioned—when he would escape into the streets, and wander hither and thither for hours with no other object than to be alone. But his spirits rose as the limit of uncertainty drew nearer; some alterations in the text, demanded at the last moment by Mdlle. Thoméry, an imperious lady, afforded him employment; a full-dress rehearsal, which passed off without any *contretemps*, served to cheer him; and when the supreme moment came, he was able, with some creditable show of outward composure, to enter the box in which his wife, Varinka and Geneviève, attended by Miss Potts, had already taken their places.

From the friendly shade of the background he looked out upon a house crowded from roof to basement—upon the great ladies whose diamonds glittered all round the curve of the first tier; upon the ladies who were be-diamonded without being great; upon the critics, suave and impartial; upon the *jeunesse dorée*, vacuous, pomaded, gloved, after the manner of its kind; upon the delegates of the million overhead; and below, in the stalls and pit, upon a multitude of heads, some sleek, some bald, some shaggy, all containing a greater or less modicum of brain, which would presently be called upon to exercise its functions, and create a reputation or strangle it in its birth. And as he surveyed the throng, it seemed to him that he was looking, not so much at that many-headed master of whom Leroux had spoken as at a host of enemies whose approbation must be wrested from them by conquest, and in whose presence his own audacity and weakness became startlingly apparent. What was it to all these indifferent strangers that he had toiled day after day and night after night in perfecting the work which they were to judge of at one hearing? What did they care, though the future of two lives hung on their nod? To his excited fancy this good-natured, chattering public assumed the guise of a cruel, man-devouring dragon, against which he—poor pigmy!—must presently sally forth and do battle, with no other weapon in his hand than a goosequill.

He communicated some of these sinister impressions to Poinsot, who was standing behind him, sweeping the house with his opera-glasses, and who answered him with a shade of derision.

"You are much to be pitied, *parbleu!* It is a terrible affair that all Paris should come to see your first play, is it not? But don't you understand, oh, wretched and ungrateful young man! that you have arrived at the finest moment of your whole life? When will you feel again the delightful tremor that you do now? When will the intoxicating emotion that you will feel directly, when the clapping begins, come back to you? Do you suppose that one does not grow accustomed to the applause of the crowd as quickly as to all other things?"

"Ah, you speak at your ease: you are a successful author."

"And you are upon the point of becoming one. That is why I should be glad to exchange places with you."

Poinsot resumed his examination of the audience, and waved his hand to some distant acquaintance. How long was this ordeal going to last? Claud wondered. Would they never begin?

Nina, perfectly calm and at her ease, was pointing out to her neighbor the toilet of the Austrian ambassadress opposite.

"Real old *point de Venise;* I could swear to it at any distance."

"What has become of M. Hirsch?" Geneviève asked.

"He has gone behind the scenes," answered the Princess over her shoulder. "He is snuffing the battle from afar, like Job's war-horse."

"My dear madam!" ejaculated Miss Potts, scandalized.

"Well—what? Job had a war-horse; you will find him mentioned in the scriptures. I could give you chapter and verse, if I chose. Tell me, M. Poinsot—you who know everybody—who are those people over there?"

"Compatriots of yours, Princess—General Karakoff and his wife. Did you never meet him? He is the most inveterate gambler in Europe."

"Ah! He has an air of distinction. You might bring him to see me, some evening, if you liked."

In the midst of the fragments of conversation which caught Claud's ear from time to time and of the buzz of voices which filled all the house, three loud raps resounded from the stage, arousing, we may be sure, a corresponding number of thumps in our hero's breast. There was a general "Sh-h-h!" and the curtain rose.

There was nothing in the first act of *Amour et Amitié* which could afford a clew to the ultimate fate of the play. Ending with the marriage of Georges de Sancerre, it was little more than a prelude to the plot, and left the *motif* still uncertain. It met with a favorable, but not very warm reception; and this was about as much as could have been reasonably expected for it.

[illegible]

[illegible] Ser- [illegible]

[illegible] sustained [illegible] complete [illegible] between her and [illegible] pundits [illegible]

[illegible] Chaul. "They are [illegible]"

[illegible] And, in [illegible] was ex- [illegible] the ranks of the [illegible] remained a fair share [illegible] author's credit; and when [illegible] prolonged clapping from all [illegible] Chaul felt himself justified in singing an [illegible]

"Let me be the first to congratulate you, my dear *confrère*," cried Poinsot, stretching out his hand.

Other zealous friends came streaming in through the open door of the box, and for a few minutes our hero found himself the subject of a small ovation, and tasted all the joys of success. Then he went down to express his thanks to Mdlle. Thoméry, whom he found in high good humor, and who was not chary of her compliments in return for his. A similar interchange of civilities with the other members of the company had next to be gone through. Everybody was contented; everybody was full of confidence; already the prize seemed to be within the fortunate author's grasp.

But Act III., alas! was destined to exemplify the truth of the old proverb, that there's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip. It became only too plain that Madame de Charolles was the sole character that interested the audience. She continued to be received with marked sympathy; but her appearances were less frequent than in the foregoing act, and the scenes between the blameless Victor and Eugénie, and the former's rather lengthy soliloquies fell wofully flat. And now one of those untoward accidents occurred which have sealed the fate of many better pieces than *Amour et Amitié*. At the conclusion of a visit paid to the disconsolate Eugénie, who is as yet unaware of the full extent of her misfortune, Victor, finding the situation intolerable, and fearing lest he should be betrayed into saying too much, is made to seize his hat and make a precipitate move towards the door; while the lady innocently lays her hand upon his arm to detain him. The impersonatress of Madame de Sancerre played her part here to such purpose that she very nearly dragged Victor's light overcoat off his shoulders, whereupon some wag piped out in a shrill treble from the gallery, "*Cours vite, mon p'tit Joseph!*" which sally had the effect of bringing the scene to an end in the midst of a universal hilarity.

After this it was all up with poor Victor. Every time he appeared upon the stage some fresh witticism was hurled at him from the gallery; he could not open his lips without provoking an ill-suppressed titter in all quarters of the house. The unfortunate actor was fairly put out of countenance at last, and mumbled through his part in a sufficiently ridiculous and shamefaced manner.

In the fourth act matters went even worse. The audience no longer laughed, but yawned. A murmur of conversation began to make itself heard; some persons moved from their places, making more noise over it than was necessary; a few left the theater. Not all the skill of Mdlle. Thoméry, not the

chef-d'œuvre in the form of a ball-dress which she wore, not the development of the plot, nor the dialogue which had cost Claud so many laborious hours of polishing and repolishing availed to stave off the impending catastrophe. No room for illusions was left: *Amour et Amitié* had been weighed in the balance, and found wanting.

And yet the piece was by no means without its good points. Witness the opinion of M. Poinsot—a competent judge, if ever there was one—who maintains to this day that it was within an ace of making a hit. But the story was ill-suited to the stage; it dragged painfully in places, and lacked action throughout. Moreover, Claud had taken too literally M. Leroux's caution against fine phrases. In his determination to avoid bombast, and to use only the language of real life, he had erred in the opposite direction, and made his personages talk coolly and concisely upon occasions when, in real life, less measured utterances would probably have been heard. It was from real life that he had studied, but he had omitted to study real life under abnormal conditions; and the result was that he produced a picture in which one boldly and cleverly drawn figure was flanked by a number of uncertain outlines. Out of such materials as he had worked upon an entertaining story might possibly have been constructed—hardly a tolerable play.

The one dramatic situation of the fifth act came too late to dispel the ill-humor of an angry and disappointed public. It was scarcely looked at or listened to; and the actors, who had loyally done their best, and struggled for an hour or more past against a foregone condemnation, played hurriedly now, and with evident discouragement. Doubtless they, in common with the author and the audience, were anxious to get the unlucky business finished with all dispatch.

It is a pity that plays are not like speeches or lectures, which, if found unmistakably wearisome, can be wound up and ended, or ended without being wound up, to the great comfort of speaker and hearers alike; for, had such a course been practicable, Claud might have been spared one final humiliation. The conclusion of the play was certainly the weakest point in a composition which was not remarkable for strength in any part. The lack of poetical justice which left the prize with vice, and turned poor virtue out into the cold, was, perhaps, pardonable, seeing that the whole conception was designed to mirror life as it is, not as it ought to be; but the spectacle of an injured wife imploring the man who loves her to remain at hand as the guardian angel of the husband by whom she has been deceived, and of the said husband joining his entreaties to hers, leans, it must be confessed, rather towards he ridicu-

lous than the sublime, and there could be but little doubt as to the aspect in which it was likely to present itself to the Gallic mind. When Eugénie exclaimed, "You have proved that duty is dearer to you even than love," she was answered by cries of "*Parbleu!*" and "*Je crois bien!*" from beyond the footlights; and Georges' grave "Yes, my friend; I ask of you this last sacrifice," was greeted with roars of laughter, above which rose a piercing whistle or two, and a few ironical shouts of "Bravo!"

With this mocking tumult ringing in his ears, Claud saw the curtain fall upon *Amour et Amitié* and knew that his labor was lost, and his drama irrevocably doomed. There have been more complete fiascoes; for the approval accorded to the opening scenes might be taken as counting for something; but there could be none more irretrievable. Claud needed neither the averted gaze of Varinka, who had enveloped herself in her wraps, and was quitting the box precipitately, nor the ominous disappearance of all his quondam supporters to convince him of that. To Geneviève's whispered suggestion that some judicious excisions and alterations might yet secure a future for the play, he answered, without loss of composure, "No; it is like Humpty-dumpty; it has had a great fall, and not all the king's horses nor all the king's men can set it up again. The best thing we can do is not to say another word about the matter." He had played his trump-card and lost the trick, and now it only remained to pay and look pleasant. That part of his duty he was glad to find that he was able to perform.

Has it ever happened to the reader to be compelled to hide some acute mental or physical suffering through long hours, under a mask of smiling cheerfulness—sustained, the while, by that comfortable inward glow which may be termed, according to taste, Spartan fortitude or gratified self-love? If so, he will know what it was that enabled Claud to attend the sumptuous supper which the Princess had ordered in anticipation of his triumph, and to listen without flinching to the words of condolence and comfort meted out to him by his neighbors. They spared him nothing, those well-meaning, amiable blockheads. He had to hear a dozen polite criticisms of his piece; to be told of a score of good reasons for his failure. "Monsieur, your play is admirable. It has only this defect, which I perceived at the outset." "Monsieur, I venture to predict that you will succeed in dramatic composition yet; but in future you must be careful to avoid one palpable error." "Monsieur, I foresaw the danger that lay before you when you read us your excellent piece," and so on. The Princess, who had displayed such an unexpected familiarity with the Book of Job earlier in the even-

ing, must have been forcibly reminded of Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar as she listened to them. Well might Claud have turned upon them, like his long-suffering prototype, with "No doubt but ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you;" but he refrained, and did not even remind them that they had taken up a very different tone at the time when their strictures might have been of some use to him. Later, when the champagne had circulated freely, they dropped criticism, and became delightfully encouraging. What, after all, was one failure at the outset of a career? Who had not failed once or twice in his life? Was not Racine's first tragedy a failure? Did not Corneille have to struggle for a matter of twelve years before the Academy would open its doors to him? Really it seemed as if almost every writer of any repute must have begun in this distressing fashion. The critics grew quite merry over their historical instances, and drank Claud's health with as much enthusiasm as if he had been already crowned with the laurels which they promised him.

Among this sanguine company Eugène Poinsot was conspicuous by his absence. During the disturbance of the third act Geneviève had seen him make an eloquent grimace at the audience, and slip noiselessly away; after which he had not returned. It has already been said that M. Poinsot abhorred the sight of affliction in any form. Like the little man in the old-fashioned weather-glasses, he was only visible when the sky was clear, and popped out of sight on the approach of a storm; and since nothing that he could have said or done could, under the circumstances, have brought any great solace to his young friend, he perhaps displayed as much delicacy as good sense in absenting himself from the Princess's supper-party. This Claud understood; but such is the unreasonableness of human nature that it caused him a pang when he looked round in vain for the merry, smooth-shaven face which had beamed goodwill upon him every day for so many weeks past. We do not wish our friends to intrude upon us when we are in trouble; we are aware that it is best, both for their sake and for our own, that they should leave us to ourselves for a season; yet it is not altogether pleasant to see them skurrying across the street upon our approach, and one is sometimes sensible of an inclination to call out to them that calamity is, after all, not contagious. And, indeed, one of the chief considerations which prompt the world at large to shun the afflicted is that speech and silence are felt to be alike offensive to them. Of all his sympathizers the one to whom Claud felt most grateful was M. Hirsch, who contented himself with gripping the young man's hand warmly at parting, and saying, "Cheer up. In

my hard life, I have passed through much worse times than ever you are likely to see, and, as you perceive, I have survived. Believe me, a thick skin is a great blessing, and there is but one way of obtaining it."

These were the last words that Claud heard, as he followed his wife down the staircase to the doorway, where the Princess's *coupé* was waiting to take them home. Did Nina share the sentiments of M. Poinsot, and was it delicacy that kept her silent, as she lay back in the corner of that luxurious equipage, which bore her so swiftly through the streets? She and her husband had not exchanged a word or a look since leaving the theater. At the supper-table they had been so placed that they could not see one another, and during the quarter of an hour that had been spent in the *salon* afterwards, before Varinka, who was independent of sleep, had led the way to the card-room, they had each formed the center of a separate little group. Now they were alone; yet they seemed to have nothing to say to one another. It was an odd kind of causeless estrangement that had sprung up between them—an estrangement of which one of them had long been aware, but of which the other was only beginning to be vaguely conscious—an estrangement arising out of no quarrel that could be made up again, but out of that far more fatal drifting apart of which the sources lie too deep to be easily discerned. It may have been an undefined dread that caused them to sit speechless, side by side, each waiting for the other to say the first word.

At length, when the carriage had clattered across the Place du Havre, and was mounting the ascent of the rue d'Amsterdam at a somewhat reduced speed, Claud broke the silence with a slightly forced laugh.

"So it has been a disappointment," said he.

Her reply startled him a little. "Yes," she said; "it is the beginning."

"The beginning of what? What do you mean, Nina? I don't understand."

In truth he did not understand; nor could she enlighten him.

"Don't let us say anything more about it to-night," she exclaimed suddenly. "Talking does no good; and—and I am so tired."

"Nina, my darling, what is it?"

"Nothing," she answered; "only I am so sorry—and I wanted to tell you; but I was afraid."

"You little goose!—afraid of what?"

"I don't know. I shall be all right to-morrow morning," she said, straightening herself up and drying her eyes. "To-night I am in the dumps—it doesn't often happen to me to be

in the dumps, does it?—and somehow I feel as if everything must go wrong now."

Claud was a good deal moved. Without quite knowing why, he had never looked for much sympathy from his wife; and now—also without quite knowing why—he felt a twinge of self-reproach.

"Things shall not go wrong," he cried. "We must have courage, and make them go right. As for me, I care for nothing, so long as you love me."

And so they two climbed the long stairs that led to their home, a little comforted.

A fine, cold rain was falling, and the dawn was just breaking, gray and mournful, over the succession of tall white houses and slate roofs and chimneys which they could see from their windows. It was that most silent hour of the twenty-four which immediately precedes sunrise. The streets were deserted, the windows all shuttered, and no smoke rose from the tall chimneys. But soon the thousands who now lay sleeping would begin to stir; and in a few hours they would have set forth, each to take up his proper burden—to perform the daily task which must be gone through, be the worker sad or merry, the weather sunny or gray. Before this couple among the rest lay gray days—days of trial and despondency—and it behooved them to look into their hearts, if haply any of the courage of which Claud had spoken might be found there; for the time when it was to be required of them was at hand.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE INDISCRETION OF M. HIRSCH.

THAT thorough-paced and most unprincipled rascal Hirsch was becoming so domesticated under the soft influences that were brought to bear upon him in the Boulevard Malesherbes; he behaved himself, when there, with so much modesty and propriety, and showed so little inclination to wander elsewhere in search of disreputable diversions, that the Princess openly declared her fear that their poor friend was not long for this world. When and where she had formed her opinion of M. Hirsch's character she did not say; but it was evidently no very exalted one; nor, for that matter, did the man himself seek to disguise the fact that his life had been that of an adventurer in every sense of the word.

He used sometimes to shock and horrify Miss Potts by

reminiscences of his lawless doings in Texas, in Mexico, in the republics of South America, where, according to his own account, he must have been pursuing an unbroken career of crime for ten years or more. The banks he had broken, the pigeons he had plucked, the bottles of raw spirits which he had disposed of at one sitting for a small wager, the creditors whom he had left unpaid—all these, he gave it to be understood, were connected with the more venial class of offenses which might be laid to his charge. It has been asserted that there is one depth of moral turpitude to which no man has ever yet been heard to plead guilty, namely, that of cheating at cards. M. Hirsch must have been the single exception which proved this general rule: for he admitted, without blushing, that he was the inventor of an ingenious system, by means of which he had been able to win much money at games both of skill and chance. "They robbed me for a whole year, that *canaille*," he would remark explanatorily; "and then for nine years I robbed them. I always do my best to suit myself to my company."

One can imagine Miss Potts's uplifted hands, her trembling ringlets and quivering cap-strings. But what distressed her even more than this was M. Hirsch's cool confession that, upon two separate occasions, he had found it expedient to draw his revolver, and shoot a fellow-traveler dead in cold blood.

"This is terrible!" she would exclaim.

"It is indeed, my dear lady," Hirsch would answer, wagging his head mournfully. "It is most terrible; and I assure you that it pained me very greatly at the time. The only thing that could have pained me more than killing those gentlemen would have been their killing me. It is true that they would inevitably have done so, if I had allowed them time; but that, as I perceive you think, is but a poor excuse. When I reflect upon all the sins that I have committed in my life, I am astonished at myself—I am indeed. My history is a truly disgraceful one, and I feel that repentance comes too late."

Such remarks as these, enunciated in a feeble voice, between two fits of coughing, put Geneviève in mind of nothing so much as the confessions of Reineke Fuchs. And indeed the speaker, reclining in his arm-chair, the pensive expression of his features belied by a sly twinkle in the corner of his little blinking eyes, bore no slight resemblance to that wily quadruped. Making all allowances for a highly colored self-portraiture, designed, no doubt, chiefly with the object of causing Miss Potts to shake in her shoes, there could be no question but that the man was a consummate rascal; yet there was something

about his rascality which was not altogether repellent. Rascality—or, at all events, certain forms of it—would appear to have an occult claim upon human sympathy. Who, for instance, can read of the infamous exploits of Reineke Fuchs, to whom M. Hirsch has just been compared, without at once ranging himself upon the side of their hero? And has not the very word "rogue" come to bear an almost endearing significance?—while "roguish" is such a playful, innocent sort of adjective that it has all but fallen into disuse, as applied to adult humanity.

Hirsch, then, when in his more expansive moods, was far from being a disagreeable companion. Miss Potts herself owned to a reluctant interest in this hardened offender, and would speak of him behind his back with sighings and groanings and many a reference to the eleventh hour, and brands plucked from the burning, and so forth. Geneviève went a step further, and roundly declared that she liked M. Hirsch very well as he was. She had taken him under her especial protection. Ever since that evening when she had driven him up to Southlands in her pony-carriage, and when he had been so inhumanly turned out of doors by her father, he had been to her in some sort, like Touchstone's Audrey, a poor thing of her own. She professed to have discovered good points in his character which were not apparent to the world at large; and it is certain that if there was a soft place in Hirsch's battered old heart, Miss Gervis had gained possession of it.

When he was alone with her—and that was no unfrequent occurrence; for the restless little Princess was out of doors from morning to night—he did not dwell upon his past life, nor entertain her with a catalogue of crimes committed on the other side of the Atlantic. He asked for nothing better than to sit silent, and listen to her while she practiced her violin, and when she was tired of that, to fall back upon conversation of a kind entirely different from the specimen set down above. And now it must be confessed that there was one topic upon which he was always ready to talk, and of which his companion was in no danger of wearying. Through what channel M. Hirsch had discovered how matters stood between Geneviève and Freddy Croft—whether through Miss Potts, whose inability to keep a secret was notorious, or through Varinka, who was much vexed at this time by her step-daughter's discouragement of the advances of M. d'Arblay, an unexceptionable gentleman with a considerable fortune and a fine musical ear—signifies little; nor did Geneviève make any inquiry as to the sources of his information when—using, as he said, the privileges of a man old enough to be her father—he spoke to her upon the subject. The truth was that she was too much re-

joiced to hear the sound of Freddy's name to care very greatly by whom it might happen to be uttered. M. Hirsch was, perhaps, hardly the confidant whom she would have chosen in preference to all others, but he was far better than no confidant at all; moreover, in treating of this delicate matter, he displayed a greater amount of tact than might have been expected of him. Upon the question of the abstract advisability of the match he did not presume to enter, further than by incidentally expressing his conviction that neither "this young Sir Croft" nor any other man whom he had ever met was worthy to be the husband of mademoiselle; he confined himself to gently leading the conversation on to the subject of England, to asking Geneviève questions as to the manner of her life at Southlands, to declaring his personal admiration of the English as a people, and his regret that he had never been able to make himself better acquainted with their country. In short, he managed, without impertinence, to give the girl an opportunity of breaking the silence which had become well-nigh intolerable to her, and thus afforded her many an hour of happiness. It was his way of showing gratitude for her recognition of an outcast. And so it came about that something approaching to a fast friendship sprang up between these two very dissimilar persons.

Early in the month of June, on one of those fresh, cloudless mornings which cause the hearts of those who dwell in cities to hunger and thirst after a sight of green fields, M. Hirsch surprised Geneviève by asking her to take a walk with him. She hesitated a moment; for Varinka, while reserving to herself a liberty of action which knew no limits, had very rigid notions as to the rules by which the conduct of young girls ought to be governed, and it was doubtful whether she would have considered even M. Hirsch sufficiently advanced in years to sanction his appearance in the streets with her step-daughter, unless under the eye of a third person.

"I will ask Miss Potts whether she would like to go out," Geneviève said, moving towards the door.

But Hirsch stopped her with a supplicating gesture. "Mademoiselle, I implore you!—She irritates my nerves, that dear and respectable Potts; she has a manner of pronouncing her words which acts like a magnet upon the worst side of my nature—not to mention that those long and bony legs stride over the ground at a pace which I could never hope to maintain, with the fragment of lung that remains to me. Do not refuse me an hour of peace and quiet in the sunshine. It is the whim of an invalid, who will not have many more fancies to gratify on this side of the grave."

Geneviève was not proof against this appeal. Soon afterwards, she and M. Hirsch had mounted the Boulevard Malesherbes, had passed the gilded gates of the Parc Monceaux, and were strolling along those trim gravel walks and among those charming, if somewhat conventional, combinations of foliage and verdure, rockery and carpet-patterned flower-beds, which the Republic has inherited from the Empire. The Parc Monceaux was crowded as it commonly is on a fine summer's day. Children were chasing one another along the walks; rosy-cheeked Norman nurses were seated, knitting and chattering, on the benches provided by M. Haussmann and his successors; everywhere were loungers of the true Parisian *bourgeois* type, wandering hither and thither, without aim or object, yet not in the least bored—specimens of that contentedly idle class of *petits rentiers* to which London possesses no equivalent. M. Hirsch appeared to enjoy the whole scene immensely.

"What delicious sunshine!" he exclaimed. "What a good air! what a pretty little Arcadia! The sight of it is almost enough to make one feel young and virtuous. If only one did not know that the streets and houses of this wicked city were within a stone's throw!" Then, as if struck by a sudden idea —"If we were to take a carriage, and drive out to the Bois?" he hazarded.

But to this new proposition Geneviève demurred decidedly.

"What would Varinka say?" she asked, laughing.

"Mademoiselle, she will say nothing, for the sufficient reason that she will know nothing. Have you forgotten that she is to spend the whole day with her new friends the Karakoffs at Meudon? She was driving away as I entered—she and Madame Claud. They are made for one another those two. A more delightful couple for all the purposes of society it would be difficult to find; but as for being the husband of one of them!"—M. Hirsch, by way of ending his sentence, shrugged his shoulders expressively.

"I don't think you would ever have been in much danger of that fate, M. Hirsch," said Geneviève, with dignity. For it seemed to her that her companion was allowing himself a little too much license of criticism.

He was not in the least offended by this direct snub. On the contrary, it appeared to afford him great amusement, and made him laugh so heartily that he brought on a return of his cough. He had hailed one of the little victorias which were creeping along the drive, while he was speaking, and he was so exhausted after his paroxysm of coughing that Genevieve could not, in common humanity, refuse to let him seat himself in it.

Five minutes later, Miss Gervis was being driven slowly down the Avenue Uhrich in a hired carriage, side by side with the greatest reprobate in Paris; and any one of the Princess Ouranoff's numerous acquaintances might have witnessed this remarkable spectacle. None of them, however, did witness it. At that hour of the day (it was not yet noon) they were probably only just thinking of getting out of bed; and a large proportion of them, being people whose movements were governed by the laws of fashion, had already left Paris. There was, therefore, no real need for Geneviève to hold her parasol at such an angle as to conceal her features from the passers-by; although M. Hirsch approved of the precaution, assuring her that he fully appreciated the sacrifice which she was making in order to indulge his selfish whim, and was proportionately grateful to her. When they reached the Bois, he directed the coachman to turn away from that drive beside the lake which is the Parisian Ladies' Mile, and to follow one of the less-frequented alleys which lead towards the Pré Catelan; and as soon as they were well among the trees, he called a halt.

"With your permission, mademoiselle," said he, "we will get out now, and walk a little way. Ah! we are better here than in the Parc Monceaux, are we not? We hear no more the perpetual rattle of the streets; we have the shade—the green trees—the birds overhead. Could you not almost fancy yourself in your own home at Southlands?" (He pronounced the word "Sousselan;" but it did not sound the less pleasantly in Geneviève's ears, and the prefix of "home" was especially grateful to her.) "One could walk here all the afternoon, and not tire," he added.

He tired, however, soon enough, and was glad to take advantage of a friendly bench to rest himself upon. Presently he uttered an exclamation of dismay. "*Sapristi!* what stupidity! I have left my purse, with two thousand francs in it, in the carriage. I must go and recover it at once. Be so kind as to wait where you are for a few minutes, mademoiselle; I will join you directly."

And M. Hirsch hastened away as fast as his legs would carry him.

Geneviève had no objection to remaining where she was. She leant back on the bench, enjoying the solitude, and the whispering of the breeze through the branches, and the sunlight dancing among the young leaves, and all the delicious sights and sounds of summer; and if she did not trace much resemblance between those recently planted groves and the old oaks of England, her thoughts were probably not prevented

on that account from straying to the land that she loved. For the first five minutes she put M. Hirsch out of her mind altogether; but when five more elapsed, and he gave no sign, she became rather uneasy, and at the end of a quarter of an hour she recollected, with some alarm, that she had heard a carriage driving rapidly away immediately after he had left her. What could have happened? Had the coachman discovered the two thousand francs, and decamped with them, and had M. Hirsch forgotten all about her, and started in hot pursuit? She was taking counsel with herself as to what she had better do next, when the crunching of hastily approaching footsteps made itself heard upon the gravel, and presently a form hove in sight which was certainly not that of M. Hirsch. Geneviève's heart gave a great bound and then stood still. Was she dreaming, or could it possibly be Freddy Croft who was hurrying up, with both hands extended, to meet her?

She was not long kept in doubt. Freddy Croft indeed it was, in a very nice new suit of clothes, with a rose in his buttonhole, and that jolly little full moon of a face of his beaming all over with delight.

"It's me," he said—as though there were any necessity for making that ungrammatical announcement.

And here I cannot help breaking off for a moment to remark upon the hard fate which will not permit me to dodge the love-scenes that are forever cropping up in the course of the veracious history upon which I am engaged. As I observed upon a former occasion, I am wholly unfitted for this kind of work, and I should expose myself to the just scorn and ridicule of my readers, were I to attempt it. It is true that in connection with the meeting with which we are now concerned there are no kissings or embracings to be recorded—for it is not to be supposed that Miss Gervis would allow herself to be embraced by a young man to whom she was not engaged, and I have the best authority for stating that Freddy's reverence for this lady was so great that he would never have thought of greeting her otherwise than in the most decorous manner—but of tender words and fond glances, of reiterated queries and ardent vows, there was doubtless a sufficient interchange. And these, if you please, we will skip.

The colloquy may be taken up at the point where Geneviève, beginning to recover her mental balance, requested Freddy to give some account of himself. "Where do you come from? How do you happen to be in Paris?" she asked.

"Oh, I ran over with another fellow to do the Grand Prix," replied that ingenuous youth. "I mean," he added, correcting himself, "I made that the excuse for coming. You may guess

whether I hadn't a hope of some better luck than backing the winner. I thought I ought to have an excuse of some kind, because of what you said, you know, about our not meeting till the two years were up; but, being here, I couldn't have gone away without having one look at you. If the worst had come to the worst, I meant to have gone boldly and called upon the Princess, though Claud says the odds are she would have shown me the door."

"She would not have done that; but of course we should not have been left alone together. And I don't think I ought to stay here any longer now. What an extraordinary piece of good fortune it was that brought us both to the same spot—of all places in the world—at the same moment! After this, I shall always have a lingering reliance upon chance."

"Well—it wasn't altogether chance," Freddy confessed, with a side-glance of mingled glee and apprehension.

"Not chance! what else could it possibly be? You cannot have had any idea that I should be in the Bois this morning; for I did not know it myself when I left the house."

"I suppose not," said Freddy, much amused. "By George! what an old dodger! eh?"

"What do you mean? Of whom are you speaking?" asked Geneviève, a glimmering of the truth beginning to dawn upon her.

"Why, our old friend Rags-and-tatters, to be sure! Not that he deserves his name nowadays. Fur all over him, and a stick with a great big gold knob at the top—no end of a swell. Been robbing a bank or something, I expect. Never mind! he's a right good chap; and if ever he wants a friend, he may count upon me. You see, I went and looked up Claud yesterday—jolly little crib he's got. I say, don't you think Nina has altered for the worse since her marriage?"

"No," answered Geneviève consideringly; "I can't say that I notice any difference in her. I think she was always—much what she is now." In fact, no great feeling of amity subsisted between these two ladies.

"H'm! she wasn't over civil to me," Freddy went on. "Hardly took the trouble to speak to me. Well, as I was saying, I had a talk with Claud; and he was dead against my trying to see you. Said it wouldn't do, and the Princess wouldn't like it, and one thing and another. Altogether, I went away rather down on my luck, and strolled off to the Boulevard Malesherbes. I thought there was just a chance of your looking out of the window, or that perhaps you might be going out to dinner somewhere, and that I should see you getting into the carriage. So I hung about under the trees

there, to the great disgust of your *concierge*, who looked at me as if he suspected that I was up to no good; and after a bit, out toddled old Rags. I don't think I should have recognized him; but he spotted me directly, and before I knew where I was, he had got me into his brougham, and was driving me off to his hotel to dinner. And a very good dinner he gave me too. Well; in the evening, you know, we got talking about things, and—and the long and the short of it was that he told me that, if I would meet him at the restaurant in the Pré Catelan at twelve o'clock to-day, he would be able to give me some good news, he hoped. Which accounts for my being here at this moment," concluded Freddy complacently.

Geneviève was very properly shocked at the duplicity of M. Hirsch. She was extremely angry with him, she declared; she would never forgive him for having taken her in as he had done. But the voice in which this alarming statement was made seemed to leave room for a hope that M. Hirsch's offense might ultimately be condoned.

"And now the question is, how am I to get home? Neither you nor M. Hirsch appear to have thought of that. I suppose the only thing I can do is to walk until I meet a *fiacre;* and that will hardly be on this side of the Arc de Triomphe."

"Oh, but you are not thinking of going home yet!" exclaimed Freddy with a very long face.

"I must. Do you know what time it is?"

"By Jove!—past two o'clock. I thought I was getting uncommonly hungry," said Freddy, innocently. "But there isn't the slightest necessity for your hurrying back. The Princess is out at Meudon, you know."

"Did M. Hirsch tell you that too?"

"Of course he did. It's only justice to Rags to say that he's a man who knows what he's about. Do you know what I wish you would do?"

"Something utterly impossible, most likely."

"No, it isn't. In fact, I think it would be very wrong of you to refuse; for I know you have taken nothing in the shape of nourishment this morning, except a cup of coffee and a roll, and you must be pretty nearly starving by this time. Now, there is a little restaurant on one of the islands on the lake—the sort of place where one would be certain not to meet a soul one had ever seen before—and they could get an omelet, or something of that kind, ready for us there in a few minutes. Don't you think we might?"

Certainly not. Geneviève would not hear of such a thing. However, she allowed herself to be drawn into a discussion upon the point; and the result justified the conclusion of

the oft-quoted proverb of *Château qui parle et femme qui écoute.*

"Never mind Miss Potts for this once," Freddy pleaded. "Miss Potts is much too good a fellow to tell tales, even if she finds out where you have been; and I don't see why she should find out. And when shall we have another day together? Not for eighteen long months, perhaps." He ended with an argument which has already carried a certain degree of weight with it since the time when the world began: "No one will ever know."

At length, therefore, Miss Gervis was persuaded into what cannot be described otherwise than as a highly incorrect course of procedure; and it must, I fear, be added that she has never, up to this present time of writing, repented properly of her weakness. For the two hours which she spent with Freddy on that cockneyfied little island were two of the happiest she had ever known. The restaurant was of that class at which, on Saturday afternoons, two or three of the turbulent wedding-parties so dear to the Parisian proletariat are apt to be encountered; but as it was the middle of the week, our friends had the whole place to themselves, and were served in the open air by a greasy and obsequious waiter who, to Freddy's huge delight, addressed Geneviève as "madame" at every other word. The omelet with which they were regaled was burnt, the cutlets were tough, and the wine was execrable; but neither of them took any heed of these small drawbacks. They pronounced everything delightful, even down to the cocks and hens of the establishment, which gathered round their table, and fought for the bread-crumbs that Geneviève scattered amongst them. Then, the bill having been paid, and the greasy waiter tipped with a liberality which caused him to stare and grin from ear to ear, they wandered up into the pine-woods; and there, seating himself upon the dry ground at Geneviève's feet, Freddy related to her his experiences of the last six months. He told her how he had missed her through every hour of the day; how he had written continually to Claud, and had received only an occasional and meager acknowledgment of his letters in reply; how he had been trying hard to fit himself to be her constant associate; how he had interested himself in the welfare of his tenantry, introduced improvements into the management of the home farm, and devoted a stated portion of his time to the study of standard works.

"I had to drop poetry, though," he confessed, with a look of comical penitence. "It was no go. That sort of thing is altogether above me. Scott's the only poet I can stand. I gave them all a fair trial too; but when I got to Wordsworth's

Excursion, I felt it was quite hopeless, and I threw up the sponge."

Mill's *Political Economy*, to which he had next had recourse, as being presumably an unimaginative composition, had likewise proved too hard a nut for him to crack; but, on the other hand, he had found that he was able to read Macaulay's *Essays* with pleasure and profit. "I can do very well with Macaulay," he said, in a tone of modest exultation.

How many times afterwards Geneviève lived through that sunny afternoon again, and felt the warm breeze on her cheek, and smelt the resinous fragrance of the pines, and saw those frank blue eyes and that joyous, boyish face upturned to hers! Faces of that kind, which have no lines or traces of care upon them, usually belong to selfish people; and selfishness—at all events when it practically affects our own comfort—is a hideous thing; yet merry faces are pleasanter to look upon than sad ones; and it is certain that Geneviève would not have wished her admirer's to be altered in any particular. She did not say much. It made her perfectly happy to sit and listen to Freddy's loquacity, which never stood in need of more than the slenderest encouragement. He gave her full information of all that had taken place in Lynshire since her departure: he told her how there had been "no end of a rumpus" in the Lynchester household (cause not assigned); how Lady Lynchester had sought the protection of her own family, and had only been induced at last to return to her husband through the intervention of Lord Courtney, who had undertaken, for the credit of the county, to smooth matters over; how Mr. Flemyng had given a lecture, in the town hall at Beachborough, upon the Antiquity of Man, in the course of which he had fallen foul of the Book of Genesis and Admiral Bagshawe, insomuch that the latter had loudly denounced him as an anti-Christian agitator, and had actually threatened to drag him from the platform; how General Blair had had a stroke, but was recovering; how Miss Pennefather had been menaced with an action for slander by some maligned person; and a great deal more in the same strain. He was also able to give her the latest news of Mr. Gervis, with whom he was surprised to hear that she held no direct communication. Mr. Gervis, it appeared, had been twice at Southlands for a day or two during the winter, and had been last seen in London, "looking pretty dismal," Freddy said. "I expect he don't find it very good fun living all by himself. When we're married, we'll often have him down at Croft, and get a lot of other antediluvians to meet him and cheer him up a bit."

When they were married! It may be imagined what a

wide field for plans and projects was opened up by the bare mention of this prospective felicity, and how little account either of them took of the flying moments. Not until the sun's rays had acquired a perceptible declination did Miss Gervis awake to a full sense of her position. She consulted her watch, and gave a cry of dismay. There was just, and only just, time enough for her to reach home before the dinner hour. Somewhat sobered, Freddy hailed the little boat which had brought them to the island some hours before, and once on the other side, they hurried along the road towards Paris as fast as they could walk, till, by good luck, they encountered an empty *fiacre*. Geneviève jumped in, and, after a brief leave-taking, was driven away, remembering, as most people do at such times, a hundred things that she had left unsaid, a hundred questions that she had left unasked, and too much occupied with memories and regrets to think with apprehension of the scene which in all probability awaited her in the Boulevard Malesherbes.

In the drawing-room she found M. Hirsch, seated in his accustomed place and reading an evening paper. He did not look up, as she drew nearer to him; nor did Miss Potts, who entered the room from the opposite door at this moment, and who wore an aspect of portentous gravity, ask her any question as to how she had spent the day. This significant silence prepared Geneviève to some extent for what was coming, and she was not surprised when Varinka dashed in, like a little steam-engine, dragging her long silk train behind her.

"Geneviève—wretched girl! where have you been? Tell me the truth; I insist upon it!"

There was no occasion to insist. The accused, who did not know how to prevaricate, told the truth unhesitatingly, and with a coolness which visibly startled her small audience.

"I have been in the Bois de Boulogne with Sir Frederick Croft," said she. Neither more nor less than that.

The Princess cast her eyes up to the ceiling, clasped her hands, and let them fall, backs uppermost, before her, with a tragic gesture worthy of Mdlle. Thoméry herself, while she addressed a succession of intermittent apostrophes to space.

"Why is it that misfortunes like this happen to me, and to no one else in the world? . . . Who would ever have believed it? . . . When Nina told me that that man was here, and warned me to be careful, did I not laugh?—did I not say that I would answer for Geneviève as I would answer for myself? . . . Ah! this is a lesson to me—a cruel lesson! . . . It is written, then, that I am never to be able to trust any one!"

These plaintive ejaculations eliciting no rejoinder, the speaker

made a sudden descent from the abstract to the specific, and assailed Geneviève with a torrent of reproaches. How could she have the face to stand there, looking as if she was positively proud of what she had done? Was she aware that she had disgraced herself? Yes; disgrace was the word. If this terrible story became known, it would never be forgotten—of that she might be sure! And the deceit of it—that was the worst of all—the deliberate deceit of it!

At this juncture M. Hirsch raised himself a little in his chair, holding up his hand, as if to impose silence; and to Geneviève's no small surprise, Varinka suddenly stopped short.

"Dear Princess," said M. Hirsch in his most honeyed accents, "we can all make allowances for your natural vivacity; and it is easy to understand that, being yourself incapable of deceit, it must be especially painful to you to be deceived. Only, it would perhaps be well, before saying any more, to convince yourself of who it is that has deceived you. The sole culprit, madame, is the unworthy individual who now sits before you. It was I who hatched this execrable plot, alone and unaided; it was I who gave a rendezvous to Sir Croft in the Bois, and who inveigled mademoiselle into driving there with me. It is I who humbly congratulate myself upon my success, and who am prepared to receive the full brunt of your wrath. Scold, my dear madame—scold to your heart's content. Do not spare me; you know that I have the hide of a rhinoceros."

If anything could have exceeded the impudence of this speech, it would have been the manner of its delivery. M. Hirsch's little eyes were twinkling with malice; his chin was thrust forward; his lips were drawn back in a jeering grin which covered his cheeks with innumerable small wrinkles; his whole air was that of a man who knows how to provoke a quarrel and is determined to seek one. Varinka, however, for some reason or other, did not choose to take up the challenge.

"It is a waste of breath to scold people like you," she said, with a short laugh. "You do mischief for the sake of being malevolent. If your object was to annoy me, you have the satisfaction of knowing that you have succeeded. It is a matter of course that you should never have considered what a much worse injury you might be doing to Geneviève than to me."

Therewith she turned her back upon him, and suddenly lapsing into tenderness, flew at Geneviève, embraced her, wept over her, and declared that, if she had made use of any unkind words, it was only because she had wished her dearest child to realize the terrible risk to which she had exposed herself.

"Never deceive me again!—anything but that!" she cried,

with heartrending simplicity. "Wound me, disappoint me in any way that you please; but at least let there be no concealments between us. And another time, do not allow yourself to be persuaded into a rash action without first consulting one who loves you more than any stranger can do." And Geneviève, who was really very much ashamed of herself, readily gave the desired promise.

Under cover of this affecting reconciliation M. Hirsch quietly withdrew; and shortly afterwards, Varinka, who was going to dine out, and had already kept the carriage twenty minutes at the door, rushed back to her room to wash away the traces of tears from her eyes and to powder her flushed cheeks.

Then Miss Potts felt it incumbent upon her to take up her parable; but Miss Potts's lectures were never of a very formidable description, and Geneviève may safely be left to receive from this faithful ally the reproof which her behavior unquestionably merited.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CLOUDS IN THE RUE D'AMSTERDAM.

ONE afternoon during the preceding autumn, when the Princess had been sitting on the sands at Trouville, her attention had been arrested by the movements of one of those little beetles known to children as the devil's coach-horses, which, after the manner of its kind, was painfully scaling cliffs and precipices of sand, only to lose its foothold at the summit and roll back into the abyss from which it had started, carrying a small avalanche with it. After watching these miniature labors of Sisyphus for some minutes, the Princess had grown irritated at the spectacle of so much wasted energy, and had flicked the ugly little animal impatiently away with the tip of her parasol. "To think that there are such stupid beasts in creation!" she had exclaimed. "Is it not enough to make all one's muscles ache only to look at them?"

"So little sympathy with an innocent fellow-laborer, madame?" M. Hirsch had retorted, with his malicious grin. "For my part, I have met with ladies in the world who much resembled beetles—who were not less blind, not less persistent, and whose exertions were often quite as fatiguing and ridiculous to watch."

The Princess had stared and laughed, not perceiving that it was of her that the fable was narrated; for assuredly blindness was the last defect that she would have attributed to herself. Had she been able, for a moment, to see herself as M. Hirsch

and others saw her, she would, perhaps, have been somewhat saddened during that moment; though it may be doubted whether the lesson would have had any lasting influence upon her. It was her habit to form determinations rapidly, without the smallest prior consideration, and to stick to them doggedly, pertinaciously, until she either got what she wanted, or lost it beyond hope of recovery. That she thus undertook many a predestined and inevitable failure was of no importance to her comfort, since she never knew, nor could be convinced, that failure was inevitable; and her system had its advantages, in that it saved her from the wear and tear of reflection, and from the misgivings with which more impressionable persons are apt to be afflicted.

Thus, having made up her mind that Geneviève was to marry M. d'Arblay, or, failing him, some equally suitable individual, her resolution was not for a moment shaken by Freddy Croft's flying visit to Paris and the practical proof afforded thereby that her step-daughter's affections were not yet free. It was a *contretemps* certainly; but Varinka seldom wasted regrets upon the past, and the only effect produced upon her by this unlucky episode was to cause her to hasten her departure for Bagnères de Bigorre, where she had previously announced her intention of spending the summer months, and whither M. d'Arblay, whose parents inhabited a château in the neighborhood of that watering-place, had already betaken himself.

And so there soon came a day on which the Princess, accompanied by her whole household, including M. Hirsch, and followed by a vanload of baggage, bade farewell to her beloved Paris for a season, and was borne away towards the Lyons terminus. Claud and Nina, who had promised to see the last of the travelers, were waiting on the steps as the little procession drove up; and the leave-taking which subsequently took place between two of the ladies in the waiting-room was of a most moving description. The Princess embraced her friend and ally repeatedly, squeezed out a tear or two as a last tribute of affection, and lamented—doubtless with perfect sincerity—that she could not take Paris to the Pyrenees with her.

"Why do you not come too?" she cried. "We should be quite a family party, and you would enliven our solitude in those wilds. Claud would have as much leisure as he wanted for writing, and you and I would make up riding-parties in the mountains. One does not lead a gay life at Bagnères, it is true; but the *mise-en-scène* is enchanting—quite what one sees in the picture-books. Guides in short jackets and scarlet *bérets*, who ride before you, cracking their whips, and old women carrying distaffs, and waterfalls, and glaciers, and flocks of

sheep, and the rest. As soon as I am a little settled, I shall begin to look out for rooms for you. Yes, decidedly you must come."

But there were good and sufficient reasons, of which the Princess can hardly have been ignorant, to prevent Nina from visiting the Pyrenees, and, indeed, from leaving Paris at all. Clouds were drifting up over the once smiling skies of the rue d'Amsterdam—clouds of difficulty, clouds of debt, which every day assumed a more and more menacing aspect, and charged the domestic atmosphere with electricity. Any one who had watched this newly married pair during the weeks that had followed the downfall of *Amour et Amitié*, who had observed the anxious politeness that marked their intercourse, the unwillingness which they displayed to be left alone together, and the apprehensive glances which they exchanged from time to time, would have had no difficulty in guessing that each of them was in mortal terror of letting fall the spark which might bring about an explosion. Things had, in fact, come to such a pass that Claud trembled at the sound of the door-bell, and could never open the envelopes that lay beside his plate on the breakfast-table without a sickening sensation of dread. It was not only that household expenses were heavy and apparently not to be reduced; but bills of the kind known as "small," but which, in his case, only seemed to deserve the epithet as applied to the value of the articles charged for, had lately been pouring in upon him in alarming numbers. There were bills for gloves, bills for boots and shoes, bills for perfumery and one several pages long from the hair-dresser, who, it appeared, had been summoned, six evenings out of the seven during the past winter, to arrange Nina's golden-brown locks, and who, as Claud ruefully remembered, had been used to raise a most unpleasant smell of burning over his operations. Claud paid them all, not only without remonstrance, but without even mentioning them to his wife. It was, indeed, impossible that she should have defrayed all these debts out of her own slender allowance, and he could not bring himself to reproach her for having incurred them. Besides, what would have been the use of reproaches? What was done could not now be helped, and it was best that he should bear the worry of it alone. He cherished a hope that with the end of the ball-giving season some curtailment of expenditure would become possible; and in the mean time, being unable to maintain a cheerful demeanor, he was glad that his wife should spend the greater part of her days with Varinka and enjoy herself while she could. "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die," he had said to himself, with a melancholy smile.

But now Varinka was gone, and Nina's occupation with her. Seed-time also was past, and harvest at hand. No wonder our young couple drove away from the station with very serious faces, and did not find much to say to one another on the way home.

"Paris in the end of June is like Oxford in the Long Vacation: nobody ought to be there, unless he is in want of a decent excuse for blowing his brains out, or is so immersed in study that it doesn't signify to him where he is."

It was from Nina that *ennui* and lassitude drew this sentiment, one sultry morning about ten days after the Princess's departure. Claud looked up from his writing, and sighed; which only served to increase her long pent-up irritation.

"Oh, it is all very well for you," she said. "You have something to do."

Undaunted by his misadventure, Claud was once more busily engaged upon a play. He had also, at this time, found employment upon the staff of a small newspaper, for which he wrote articles at I forget what infinitesimal rate of payment. It was, in truth, less for the sake of remuneration than for that of work that he kept up his connection with it. He met Nina's eyes with a look of puzzled concern.

"I'm afraid you must find this sort of life almost intolerable," he said; "but perhaps it won't last long. If I have any luck, I ought to be making money by this time next year, and then we shall be able to go away, like other people. I wish I could think of some amusement for you now; but really I don't know what there is."

"There are Musard's concerts in the evenings," suggested Nina. "It isn't wildly exciting; but at least one sees human beings there; and anything is better than sitting at home, with one's hands before one."

"H'm! You see, the evenings are my best time for writing."

It will be perceived that Mrs. Gervis's vision of conjugal felicity had been definitively abandoned by this time.

"Oh, how I *hate* writing!" she exclaimed, with a sudden outburst of revolt. "How I detest the sound of a pen scratching over the paper! I wish there were no pens in the world, and no paper or ink either! I'm sure nobody would lose much. No, I don't mean that," she added hastily, coming closer to him, and passing her hand lightly over his hair. "Poor, tired old fellow! it is horrid of me to grumble, when you are working so hard. But it *is* dull."

It certainly was. All Nina's acquaintances were away; no one came to see her, nor was there any one whom she could visit. The southern aspect of the little flat in the rue d'Am-

sterdam, which had prepossessed its occupants so much in its favor in the winter time, rendered it hot and stuffy now; and to sit all the day long behind closed shutters, with nothing to do but to read novels, is, it must be admitted, a regimen calculated to depress the spirits of the most cheerful of people. It is hardly surprising that Nina's thoughts should have reverted occasionally with something of regret to the shady lawn at the Moated House and her hammock under the cedar-tree, and to the neighbors of whose society she had once professed herself so weary.

There are, however, worse things in the world than dullness, as Claud discovered, when he received, that same evening, an intimation from his bankers that he had overdrawn to the extent of four hundred pounds odd, together with a request that he would restore the balance at his earliest convenience. And then, since misfortunes never come singly, he was informed that a person wished to speak to him—which person, on being ushered in, announced himself, with many bows and apologies, as the representative of the upholsterers from whom Nina's carpets and sofas had been ordered six months before, and stated that he was instructed by his principals to invite monsieur to regulate his little account. This was precisely what Claud had been dreading for some time past. In the beginning of the year he had received his upholsterer's bill—which, it is needless to say, surpassed his utmost apprehensions in amount—and, finding it too painful an object for contemplation, had thrust it away out of sight, and, as far as possible, out of mind. Latterly, however, being tormented continually by visions of creditors, known and unknown, he had asked himself more than once what in the world he should do if these people were to press for payment. And now the worst had come; his fears were realized. There stood the man, smiling and deferential, the first dun Claud had had to face in his life, and this novel experience was so disagreeable to him that he displayed his agitation in a most injudicious manner.

Nevertheless, he made a feeble effort at taking up a high tone. He was very much surprised, he said, at being annoyed in this way. As it happened, it would be rather inconvenient to him to pay so large a sum at that particular moment. He should have imagined that the recommendation of the Princess Ouranoff would have been a sufficient guarantee of his solvency. Surely it was very unusual to make these demands within such a short time as six months after the execution of the order.

The man interrupted him. "Pardon, monsieur! not at all unusual. It is the invariable custom of the firm to present

all accounts for payment half-yearly." (He might have added that this custom obtained only with reference to needy dwellers on fourth stories). "With old customers, and families who honor us with extensive orders, we naturally deal differently; but at Paris there is such a constant coming and going, so many strangers spend a few months here and then go away—often, alas! without leaving an address behind them—monsieur will conceive that it has been necessary for us to adopt a strict rule."

Poor Claud did not at all understand how to deal with this importunate person. "And supposing that I cannot comply with your rule?" he asked.

"In that case— But I permit myself to hope that no such emergency will arise."

"Never mind your hope," said Claud; "supposing it does arise?"

"*Mon Dieu*, monsieur, we are not more disposed to give away our property than other people. In the last instance we should be compelled, most reluctantly, to resort to legal measures."

This was indeed terrible. "Well," said Claud, after a pause, during which he had had time to draw an agonizing mental picture of himself in the bankruptcy court, "you had better tell your master that I will call upon him shortly. He is putting me to a good deal of trouble; but he will get his money."

The man apologized profusely. Monsieur would comprehend that he was only a subordinate; his duty was simply to obey orders. Might he mention a date for monsieur's visit?

"We will say a fortnight hence," answered Claud firmly. "I told you before that I had not the sum by me at this moment." And he was much relieved when this postponement was acceded to without protest.

Having thus contrived to materially damage his credit, he got rid of his unwelcome visitor.

Half an hour afterwards Nina found him seated, with his head in his hands, the picture of mute despair, and had much ado to repress her laughter when she heard what was the matter. "My dear boy," she exclaimed, "you are as simple as a baby! Do you really believe that people discharge their debts twice a year? Why, one might as well pay over the counter at once. The best thing you can do is to go down to this man's shop to-morrow morning, and tell him that, if he has the impudence to bother you before this time next year, you will never employ him again."

But Claud shook his head despondently. "It is all very well for people who have money in the bank to be plucky," said he;

"but when one can't pay, one becomes a coward in spite of one's self. I know I shall have to meet this bill somehow; but how is more than I can imagine."

"Well," said Nina after a moment, "if you are determined to pay—though I do think it is demoralizing to tradesmen to treat them in that way, and hardly fair upon other people—still, if you are determined, there is a means of doing it, you know, and a very simple one."

Claud stared, and asked, "What means, in the name of goodness?"

"You might write to Mr. Gervis, and ask him to help us out. I am sure he would."

"And I am perfectly sure that he would not."

"Then I don't see anything for it but the workhouse. But, after all, why pay? Why not remain in debt? It doesn't hurt."

She was leaning against the wainscot beside the open window, plucking dead leaves from the plants that stood there, and watching them flutter down into the street below. Something in the utter indifference of her voice and attitude stung Claud into an unusual warmth of retort.

"Doesn't hurt!" he repeated; "but it does hurt—it hurts horribly! Is it possible that you don't feel the degradation of having to go to a shopkeeper, hat in hand, and beg for time?"

Nina turned her pretty face towards him with an odd look, shaking her head slightly. "I don't feel anything of the kind," she said. "I don't even know what you mean. Something wanting in me, I suppose. It is just what I have known from the first—you are too good for the likes of me, and now you are beginning to find it out. It is a thousand pities that I let you marry me."

"From the moment that you think so, of course it is so," returned Claud, who was too much hurt to have complete mastery over his tongue.

Nina did not answer immediately; she had resumed her occupation of pulling off the leaves, and casting them idly into the air. "It can't be helped, though," she remarked at length. And then, after a break, "Claud!"

"Well."

"Don't you think it is about time for us to go back to England, and make it up with our relations, and partake of fatted calf? Papa is quite ready to kill his. In fact, he has killed it already. I heard from him this morning."

She felt in her pocket, and produced a letter, for which Claud held out his hand silently. They had not yet passed out of that early stage of matrimony in which letters ad-

dressed to either husband or wife are held to be common property. Nina relinquished this one—not without a slight movement of hesitation.

It was a long, not unkindly epistle, couched in Mr. Flemyng's customary pompous language. The upshot of it was that, so long as he had a house to call his own, his daughter would be welcome to use it as her home; that she was greatly missed by the whole household, and that he hoped that, when she came, she would make a long stay. Lynshire he was sure, would be a pleasanter place of residence than Paris, at all events until the autumn. Two things struck Claud as he perused this composition: in the first place, that it was an obvious answer, not a spontaneous invitation; in the second place, that there was singularly little question of his existence in connection with the matter. "I shall be delighted to see you—and your husband too, if he is inclined to take a holiday, and if his literary avocations permit of his doing so," Mr. Flemyng wrote. He handed the letter back to his wife without a word, looking at her rather gravely. There was a faint flush on her cheeks.

"Yes," she said, answering his unspoken question, "I wrote to him. I thought you wouldn't mind; and—and it is so hot and so dull here. And now there is this bother about money, it is all the more desirable that we should make ourselves scarce for a time, and economize. Will you come?"

"I think not," answered Claud, with a somewhat grim smile. "I have my work to do here, and I could not well leave it—not to speak of the objections which some of our tradesmen might raise to losing sight of me. But I see no reason why you should not go. It is certainly, as you say, very desirable that we should economize, and there is no doubt at all about its being hot and dull in Paris. You had better write to your father, and say that you will join him in a few days."

If he expected Nina to protest that she could not go to England without him; if he thought she would feel that there was a certain cowardice in effecting her own escape and leaving him alone to battle with the enemy, he was mistaken. She jumped at his suggestion with rather cruel alacrity; her face broke out into smiles and dimples.

"Oh, how nice of you!" she exclaimed. "I was afraid you would make difficulties. What time is it? Shall I save the post if I write at once?"

She opened her blotting-book, and began to scribble off a note, talking all the time. "It will be so much the best plan —we really couldn't have gone on much longer as we have been doing lately."

"No; I really don't think we could," said Claud, dryly.

"When I am gone, you will be able to live ever so much more cheaply. And after a time, when you are not quite so busy, you must run over too and take a rest. Don't you long to see the sea again? We will go out prawning, as we used to do, when you come, and we will play lawn-tennis and have lots of fun. It will be just like last year. Oh, what an age ago all that seems now!"

Her high spirits lasted throughout the evening; her tongue wagged incessantly. Would Mr. Gervis be at Southlands? she wondered. If so, she would see him, and make a conquest of him forthwith. He could not be such an old wretch as to let them starve, when he was so rich himself, and when Claud had been working so hard to earn a living. What a nuisance money was, to be sure! "Do you know I really thought we were going to have a serious quarrel this afternoon," she said once.

Claud tried to laugh. He was deeply offended, but he was too proud to show that he was so; or if he did show that he was so, she did not notice it. He watched her and listened to her with amazement. It seemed to him that she had been suddenly changed by some malign enchantment. Was this the same Nina whom he had wooed in the Beachborough woods, and who had declared, only a few short months ago, that no two people could be more happy than he and she? He could hardly believe that she could be really overjoyed at the prospect of leaving him. But then he did not know how many weary hours of boredom she had had to endure.

At eleven o'clock she went off to bed, still jubilant, leaving Claud to devote another two hours or so to work, according to his custom. He sat up, that evening, longer than usual; but contemporary literature did not profit by his vigil. Facts, not fiction, engrossed all his thoughts—facts, supported by figures, and extenuated by no grateful illusion of hope. Striving by every imaginable means, through those doleful night-watches, to make a pint pot contain a quart measure, Claud was brought, as one result of this vain struggle, to acknowledge that Nina had been right, and that it was far better that she should leave Paris for a time. Another, and an even less palatable conviction forced upon him, was that she had been right in this also, that he must apply to his father for help. Beggary or bankruptcy—such were the two horns of the dilemma between which our unfortunate hero found himself placed. I suppose that most people so situated would have chosen the former alternative. If so, Claud only cast in his lot with the majority; but the doing of it was a bitter pill for him to swallow. About

two o'clock in the morning he seized a sheet of note-paper, and, in a sort of angry despair, dashed off the following laconic missive—

"Rue d'Amsterdam, Paris, 29th June.

"DEAR GOVERNOR,

"I have come to immeasurable grief. I have written a play which has been all but hissed off the stage; I have overdrawn every shilling of my next half-year's allowance, and, as far as I can make out, I owe at least as much again. Altogether, it will take about £800 to set me straight. Will you advance me the money? It is possible that I may be able to repay you by installments; but I dare not make any promise, for everything goes askew with me. I haven't the face to add anything more. Please let me have a line to say Yes or No.

"Your affectionate son,

"CLAUD GERVIS."

Claud wrote this note at a great pace, as timorous people, who doubt their own resolution, take a dose of castor-oil, and without reading it over, put it into an envelope, addressed and stamped it. Having done this, he retired to bed, and, let us hope, to sleep. The letter was dispatched in due course, and, notwithstanding Claud's expressed conviction that nothing would come of it, we may be sure that he knew very well which was the earliest post that could bring him a reply, and was not a little disappointed when none came. The disappointment recurred the next day, and the next, and every day. Claud fell into that habit which is said to bring no luck with it, and which unquestionably entails much discomfort, of watching for the arrival of the postman. Twice in every twenty-four hours he suffered agonies of suspense if that functionary was a little behind his usual time, of despair if he passed the door, or, worse still, left a packet of letters, among which was not the one which should contain the awaited sentence.

It was indeed as a prisoner at the bar that Claud regarded himself—arraigned before the judgment-seat of one who bore the character of being impervious to appeals for pity. He knew that Mr. Gervis seldom went back from his decisions; he remembered, only too distinctly, that he had been warned that £700 a year, and no more, was what he had to expect; but he also knew that his father's heart was less hard than was commonly supposed, and he felt that the only hope before him lay in the chance of his having touched it. As for paying the upholsterer's bill without assistance, it was out of the question.

Things were even worse with him than he had supposed. What little cash he had in hand would be required by Nina for her journey; he did not know where to seek for money-lenders, nor how to transact business with those gentry, when found; and even were he to have recourse to the extreme measure of sending every stick in his possession to the *Mont-de-Piété*, the sum realized would fall far short of that required.

During these somber days Nina was gayly making the necessary preparations for her move. She was not in reality quite so unfeeling as her conduct seemed to imply; but to sympathize with her husband in such troubles as were then harassing him was beyond the range of her powers. At the bottom of her heart she felt an amused contempt, not indeed for the man, but for the absurd notions which he had taken up. To her it was no new sensation to be dunned. To her Claud's fears appeared purely chimerical and his scruples Quixotic—the sort of scruples which artists and poets and such people might be expected to feel, but which were wholly out of place in dealings with a hard-headed and selfish world. Howbeit, she kept her thoughts to herself, endeavoring only to cheer up the disconsolate Claud with frequent allusions to the good time coming, when they would go out yachting in Beachborough bay, and ride across the downs to Lynchester, and divert themselves as of yore. And in the end she did succeed in so far infecting him with her own good spirits that his anger passed away, and he ceased to blame her for desiring a holiday. Neither of them very well understood the other; but perhaps, of the two, he understood her better, at this time, than she did him.

A morning came at last on which Claud found himself walking sadly away from the Northern station, with Nina's last words, "Mind you come soon," still ringing in his ears. Did she want him to come soon? She had cried a little before saying good-by; she had even gone so far as to express some rather tardy compunction at leaving him. Yet Claud could not help mentally comparing her departure to the flight of a bird from its cage. He went back to his deserted rooms, where the doors all stood open, where the empty drawers were dragged out, and the floor was still strewn with scraps of packing-paper. The *bonne*, who, with the instinct of her class, had discovered that something was amiss, and suspected a quarrel—for which, in the nature of things, monsieur must be to blame—stared at him with inquisitive and not over-friendly eyes. Perhaps it was to punish him for his supposed misconduct that she served him with a cold breakfast and filled his *café au lait* with blacks. It was horribly lonely. The bird was flown, her

pleasant chirping silenced, and who could tell when he might hear it again? According to all appearance, he would ere long have no cage to put her into.

And now Claud fell into a state of apathy which was a mere waiting for the inevitable crash. He laid aside his new play, finding that his imagination refused to answer to the spur, and although he did some mechanical work for the newspaper with which he was connected, he would have been puzzled to say, an hour afterwards, what it was that he had written about. He has, in fact, since assured me that he recollects next to nothing of this trying part of his life, and does not care to talk about it.

It was the tenth day after that on which he had written to his father, and he had given up all hope of receiving a reply, when a letter addressed in Mr. Gervis's precise little hand-writing was delivered to him. He tore it open, and his heart died within him when he found that it contained no check. But this was the letter.

"*Yacht 'Siren,' Plymouth, 7th July.*

"MY DEAR CLAUD,

"Your note has been forwarded to me. I had heard that the Parisians had declined to crown you with laurels, and was sorry for it; though I do not see the slightest reason to doubt the accuracy of their discrimination. Where the deuce did you find a manager to accept your piece? When I next go to Paris I shall be glad if you will introduce me to that person: it is always comforting to meet with a brother fool. That I am a fool is a fact that has long been patent to myself, and I observe signs of its being not altogether a secret to others; but in order to remove any lingering skepticism that may exist upon the point, I have just ordered £800 to be paid in to your bankers.

"I understand that your wife is on a visit to that intellectual father of hers. For this and other reasons, I propose to steer clear of Beachborough for the present.

"I am suffering from an attack of rheumatism which makes me long to flay some one alive; and the sole victim at hand is Evans, upon whom my bitterest sarcasms produce no effect whatsoever. It has occurred to me that, under existing circumstances, you would hardly feel justified in resenting any amount of refined cruelty; and I therefore have it in my mind to get you on board this ship, and take you for a cruise. Let me have a note to say whether this will suit your arrangements, and whether I shall pick you up at Cherbourg or at Havre.

"Yours,

"V. G."

When Claud had finished reading the above communication, he burst out into a laugh which was not unlike a sob. "Dear old governor!" he exclaimed aloud. "After all, there is no one like him in the world!" Go to him?—of course he would go to him. He had understood Mr. Gervis's tacit appeal. "And he shall bully me to his heart's content!" cried Claud. "Only I know he won't. He'll heap coals of fire on my head. Where's my check-book?—where's that ruffian's bill? Oh, wasn't it worth all the infernal torture I have been through to find out what a dear, good fellow that governor of mine is!"

To do Claud justice, Mr. Gervis's letter had made him quite as happy as his £800. He had never been able to forgive himself for the deception which he had practiced upon his father; memories of bygone days had risen up in perpetual accusation against him, and the breach brought about by his marriage between him and the whimsical personage who, all his life long, had been as much a friend and a brother as a father to him, had caused him many and many a secret pang. What did he care if the future were still somewhat obscured by mists? What did it matter to him that, when all outstanding liabilities should have been discharged, there could only remain to his credit a matter of a hundred pounds or so upon which to support life for the last six months of the year? He was free; he had his pen; now that he was alone, he could live upon almost nothing. He walked up and down the room, hardly able to contain himself for satisfaction. He longed to tell somebody of his good fortune. If he had not been too much afraid of the crabbed old servant who ruled his establishment, he would have rung for her, and presented her with the price of a new gown there and then. In the fullness of his joy he broke out into song—

"Mes amis, la terre est à moi.
J'ai de quoi
Vivre en roi,
Si l'éclat me tente.
Les honneurs me sont dévolus;
J'ai cinquante écus,
J'ai cinquante écus,
J'ai cinquante écus de rente!"

In the midst of this triumphal chant somebody who had knocked twice without obtaining any answer thrust a bullet head and a large, good-humored countenance through the doorway. The head was presently followed by a body of noble proportions.

"Eh! eh!" ejaculated the intruder, with an air of comical bewilderment; "it seems that adversity raises our spirits here. *Sapristi*, what an original!"

"What, Poinsot! is that you? Look here—just read this

letter, will you? No, you can't read it; I'll translate it. There's a father for you! do you think there are many of that kind? Ah, but you don't know how I have treated him, and what he has saved me from."

"*Tiens, tiens, tiens!*" muttered M. Poinsot. "So we possess a benevolent father with an open purse, do we? And I who came here, flattering myself that I was about to act the good Samaritan! Don't look alarmed; I was not going to take any liberties; but from rumors that reached me, I fancied that you might be glad of rather more remunerative employment than that of writing for *Le Petit Voyou;* and the long and the short of it is that I am the bearer of an offer to you from the editor of a paper which is able to pay its contributors at a reasonable rate."

Here M. Poinsot named a journal of established reputation, and explained to Claud what would be the nature of the work required of him and the amount of profit which he might expect to derive from his labors.

Claud dropped into a chair, and covered his face with his hands. "Everything comes at once!" he exclaimed. "Ah, Poinsot, they may say what they like; but life has its good moments!"

Poinsot looked at the young fellow rather oddly. Perhaps he felt a little ashamed of his tardy help. "I should have been to see you before," he said; "but I was for some time away, at Vichy and elsewhere, and when I came back, I had no idea at first that—that—"

"I know—I know. How could you guess that I had reduced myself to beggary? The truth is that I have been careless and extravagant and have got myself into a very pretty mess; but now, thanks to you, I shall be able to keep my head above water, I hope. I have not said much; but I trust you understand how grateful I am."

"What for? For acting as a go-between? That is all that I have done; and my friend the editor has just as much reason to thank me as you have. It is not exactly the mines of Potosi that I have thrown open to you; but it may serve your purpose until you see your way to something better. And how goes on the new play?—for of course you have begun a new one."

"How could you tell that?" cried Claud in genuine astonishment. "I should not have thought that any one would have credited me with so much presumption. But it is true enough that I have got another drama about half written in my drawer. I wonder—would it bore you very much?—as you are here—would you mind just giving one glance at the outline, and telling me what you think of it?"

The good-natured Poinsot did not refuse. He gave up the rest of the morning to a careful study of Claud's fresh effort, and then the two friends went out together, and, after paying the upholsterer, whose obsequiousness was delightful to witness, proceeded to that handsome newspaper-office with which Claud was soon to become better acquainted. Here it was arranged that the new contributor should enter upon his duties at the end of a fortnight; and the day ended with a dinner at the Café Anglais, provided at the expense of M. Poinsot, who subsequently averred that never, before or since, had he enjoyed so large an amount of vicarious happiness as upon this auspicious occasion.

It may be hoped that Mr. Gervis also enjoyed his fortnight's cruise among the Channel Islands; for it will surely be admitted that he deserved to do so. When Claud's time was up, he returned straight to Paris, without taking Beachborough on his way. Nina sent him plenty of affectionate little letters, but agreed with him that he was in duty bound to devote the whole of his short holiday to his father. Her own father, she wrote, would not hear of her leaving England before the beginning of the winter.

So Claud went back to Paris alone, to take up his part as one of the resident workers in the city which he had hitherto scarcely known, save as strangers know it. In that new and busy world, where he made many friends, and added considerably to the store of his experience, and where each day brought him some fresh aid towards that study of mankind which he had chosen to adopt as his profession, we may for the present take leave of him.

CHAPTER XXIX.

IN THE LINCOLNSHIRE WOLDS.

IF Mr. Flemyng had been shown the letter in which he was represented as protesting against the notion of his daughter's leaving him, a slightly disdainful smile would probably have illumined the features of that superior being. Nina was, as he had told her, heartily welcome to make use of her old home whenever it might suit her to do so; but to suppose that the society of any member of his family was, or could be, indispensable to Mr. Flemyng would have been to show a lamentable misconception of a nature becoming daily more and more weaned from earthly affections by contemplation of the abstract, and accustomed, in its less lofty moods, to occupy it-

self rather with the welfare of the community than with those narrower family cares which chiefly interest women. In the compassionate toleration with which he regarded women and children at large Mr. Flemyng included his own offspring. He admitted a certain degree of responsibility for them; he paid —not without casual rufflings of the philosophic calm—for their sustenance, their clothing, and their education; but, like his neighbor Mr. Gervis, he was a disbeliever in natural affection, and in fact looked upon the circumstance of his having children at all as merely one of those retributions which inexorable Nature inflicts upon the heedlessness of youth.

It may be assumed, therefore, without fear of doing Nina an injustice, that her father's alleged unwillingness to part with her was but a euphemism for her own reluctance to spend the hot months of August and September in Paris, and that she did not mean to imply that she would remain during the whole of that time stationary at the Moated House. As a matter of fact, she was scarcely there at all after the first few weeks. For a time the freedom, the space, the comfort of having plenty of servants at command, the cheerful racket of a large household, and the shady repose of summer lawns had sufficiently refreshed her soul. Even Jacky and Tommy, whose reverence for their sister was in no way deepened by her new dignity as a married woman, had had their charms; and it had been amusing to receive the visits of the neighbors, to submit her Parisian dresses to their envious gaze, to laugh in her sleeve at their oddities, and to baffle their inquisitive queries about her husband. But delights of this kind soon pall upon an energetic disposition; and before the end of July Mrs. Claud Gervis had come to the conclusion that it was high time to let her friends know that she was in England.

Of these the name was legion; for Nina Flemyng had always been one of those girls whom everybody likes: especially had she been dear to ladies with country-houses to fill. Cheerful, pretty, well-dressed, fond of fun and ready for anything that might be going, yet in no way what could be called a fast young woman, her worth had been fully appreciated by those *châtelaines*. Some of them, who had not only big houses but unmarried eldest sons also to look after, had, it is true, fought a little shy of her at times; but now that she was both married and unincumbered with the society of her husband, the list of her qualifications as a desirable guest seemed to be complete; and in a brief space of time she had more invitations than she could accept.

So, while Claud was scribbling away for dear life on the other side of the Channel, his wife was flitting from one En

glish county to another, charming all whom she met and leaving scores of smitten hearts in her wake. She wrote to Paris with commendable regularity, sometimes giving humorous descriptions of the persons whose salt she was eating, sometimes merely acknowledging the receipt of letters or papers, but very generally asking for remittances. Some people raised their eyebrows when they heard that she was a bride of less than a year's standing, and wondered that she should be already roaming about the world unprotected; but the majority troubled neither themselves nor her with speculations about matters which did not concern them. There was no scarcity of wives without their husbands and husbands without their wives in the various places to which her wanderings led her.

Now it came to pass that, in the last days of September, Mrs. Gervis reached a certain house which stands upon the edge of the Lincolnshire wolds, and there fell in with an old friend and neighbor, whom, as it had chanced, she had not encountered since her return to her native land. She arrived late in the afternoon, and was sitting in the drawing-room before dinner, taking stock of the men whom partridge-shooting had attracted to those parts, as they strolled in, one by one, when suddenly a well-known dapper little figure showed itself amid a cluster of strange ones. The new-comer caught sight of her at the same moment, and straightway advanced towards her, joy depicted upon his countenance.

"Fancy meeting you here!" he exclaimed. "The very person of all others whom I wanted to see! This *is* a bit of luck."

"How flattering!" said Nina, holding out her hand to him. "I am sure I am delighted to see you; but had you any very particular reason for wishing to see me, if one may ask?"

"Oh, I heard you were in England—hoped we should come across one another—such a long time since we've met," Freddy answered, a little confused; for he had been upon the point of giving a perfectly honest reply, and had only been checked by a timely recollection that few ladies like to be told that they are welcome chiefly for the sake of any information which they may be in a position to impart as to the welfare of another of their sex.

"Not such a very long time, is it?" asked Nina innocently. "When was it that you were in Paris? Scarcely more than three months ago, I think. But perhaps you have forgotten that we met there."

"No fear! I remember perfectly well that I called upon you, and, by the same token, that you wouldn't have anything to say to me."

"I was brought up to speak when I was spoken to," an-

swered Nina demurely. "You didn't come to the rue d'Amsterdam to see me, you know, and it wasn't for me to interrupt your conversation. Let me see: it was the Grand Prix that brought you over to Paris, wasn't it? How pretty that Longchamps course is!—and all the woods round it too. I don't know a pleasanter place to spend a quiet day in than the Bois."

Freddy looked at her, half amused, half alarmed. Evidently the murder was to some extent out; but did Nina know the whole truth, or was she fishing? He was almost inclined to rely upon her good nature and their long-standing friendship, and make a clean breast of it. For he was dying for news of Geneviève, and he was sufficiently versed in the ways of women to be aware that the surest method of enlisting their sympathy is to flatter their vanity by intrusting them with a secret. But before he had time to commit himself, he was led away to the other end of the room to be introduced to the lady whom he was to take in to dinner; and it was not until much later in the evening that he found another opportunity of approaching Mrs. Gervis.

She was then seated, a little apart from the rest of the company, upon one of those low, deep sofas which modern upholstery has adapted, with luxurious improvements, from a shape in use among our forefathers, and which is designed to accommodate not more than two persons. Some one who had been talking to her had just risen, and Freddy hastened to secure the vacant place before anybody else could make for it.

"Heard anything of the Princess lately?" he asked, with a fine assumption of carelessness, as he sank down upon the cushions.

"I had a letter from her a few days ago," answered Nina. "She is in the Pyrenees, enjoying herself immensely, she says."

"All well, I hope?"

"I presume she is quite well. She didn't mention her health."

"And—er—the rest of the party? Are they all right?"

"Well, I believe M. Hirsch is not any better. But there is not much chance of his ever being any better, I am afraid."

"I suppose not. Poor beggar! Hum!"

After this there was a pause, during which Mrs. Gervis fanned herself placidly, and contemplated her neighbor with a faintly ironical smile.

"Hang it all, Nina!" burst out Freddy at last, "we've been friends all our lives, and the deuce is in it if I mayn't speak plainly to you. You know what I want well enough. Tell me all about her. I haven't so much as heard her name men-

tioned for months; and that beggar Claud is the worst correspondent that ever stepped."

Nina did not reply at once. She continued to survey her questioner with the same faint smile, as though she found him an entertaining, and at the same time rather singular study.

"What made you fall in love with her, Freddy?" she asked presently.

Freddy laughed, "How should I know? What made you fall in love with Claud?"

"Ah!"

With this somewhat ambiguous response Nina relapsed once more into silence. But after a minute or two she roused herself, as if with an effort, and said brusquely—

"Well—what am I to tell you about her? I don't correspond with her, you know. I believe she is quite well, if it is any satisfaction to you to hear that; and I suppose she is playing the violin as usual; and she has got an admirer—a M. d'Arblay, whom the Princess is moving heaven and earth to get her to marry. However, you needn't let the thought of that spoil your night's rest; there is no occasion for jealousy. From what I saw of M. d'Arblay, I should say he was exactly the husband for her—a very good fellow, rather slow, but a great musician and a man who takes a serious view of life—a male counterpart of herself, in short. And therefore, of course, she abhors him, and adores you, who haven't a thought or a taste in common with her. It's a queer world we live in."

"It's good enough for me," observed Freddy contentedly. "I'm sure I've had more luck in it than I deserve."

"Oh, if every one had his deserts!—But maybe, after all, you are less lucky than you fancy yourself. Who knows good luck from bad? 'The proof of the pudding is in the eating.' We are all of us like so many children diving into a bran-tub. We clutch hold of the biggest thing we can find; and it is not until we have retired into a corner to examine our treasure that we discover whether it is the grand prize that we have been dreaming about for weeks, or only half a brick-bat, neatly wrapped up in silver paper. Life is always planning these pleasant little surprises for us. Life, my dear Freddy, taking it all in all, is a gigantic mistake. The best way of treating it is to think about it as little as possible, and to dance and sing while one can. They are dancing in the next room now. Shall we go and take a turn? You and I used to waltz together often enough once upon a time."

Dancing was much more in Freddy's line than moralizing. He led his partner to the hastily cleared room where some ten

couples were already revolving, and there soon convinced himself that she had lost none of the skill which he had been used to admire in her in days of yore.

"Do I dance decently?" she asked, pausing, a little out of breath, at the end of their second waltz.

"You know you do," answered Freddy, laughing, "or you wouldn't put such a conceited question. Your dancing is as good as it can be."

"As good as Geneviève's?"

"I am not going to draw odious comparisons," replied the judicious Freddy. "You are both of you perfection."

"Don't be imbecile. I want to hear the truth: do I dance better than she does?"

"Well, if you insist upon being told," said Freddy, a little reluctantly, "I suppose you do. In fact I'm sure you do; but—"

"But she plays the fiddle, *n'est-ce pas?* It is like Ollendorf's exercises—'Has he a good heart?'—'No; but he has the Irishman's wooden leg.' I am not daring to put myself upon a level with her on any point, except one; and you need not grudge me that. Let me have the satisfaction of thinking that I am superior to incarnate perfection in one small particular."

Freddy did not altogether relish this tone as applied to his future wife. With happy tact, he led the conversation into another channel by asking Nina how long her period of grass-widowhood was going to last. But she interrupted him impatiently.

"For the love of Heaven, don't use that disgustingly vulgar expression, and don't talk about it at all! If you knew how many times that same inquiry has been put to me, in rather more refined terms, during the last six weeks! Let it be supposed, for the time being, that I haven't got a husband, or that he is somewhere in the room. Unless you want to get rid of me, you will avoid the subject."

She recurred to it, however, of her own accord, a little later, when the dancing was over, and she and Freddy had returned to their corner in the drawing-room.

"So here we are, partners in misfortune, two forlorn doves without our respective mates," she said; "and we can mingle our tears. So the world goes round. It seems odd, doesn't it?"

She had dropped into a very graceful and pensive attitude, her cheek resting on her hand and supported by the most perfectly modeled arm in the world. There had been a time when Freddy had admired that hand and arm prodigiously—when, in point of fact, he had been within an ace of soliciting the former for his own. But circumstances had ordained other-

wise. Lady Croft had been over-anxious; Nina herself had thought fit to snub him at the critical moment; and so he had drawn back, and that fine project had melted into air, like many another that had preceded it. Was it some memory of those half-forgotten days, Freddy wondered, that caused Nina to discover oddity in the present situation? He judged it, in any case, best to ignore the allusion, and to answer only the first of her remarks.

"I dare say we shall neither of us shed tears," he said; "though I can tell you I sometimes feel very much like it. This sort of thing is precious hard lines on a fellow, mind you. You're different; I don't see that you have much to growl about. You can write to Claud, and hear from him, every day of your life, and I suppose you can go to him whenever you feel inclined?"

"Perhaps he doesn't want me to go to him," she returned in a low voice, looking down at the tips of two tiny black satin shoes, which were quite new—being, indeed, one of half a dozen pairs which Claud had just sent her from Paris at her request. Then she looked up suddenly, so that her eyes encountered Freddy's, and added, with a sort of forced gayety, "You forget that I am married to an author, and that with husbands of that persuasion, Art (with a big A) begins the alphabet, and wife (with a small w) comes very near the end of it."

Freddy looked at her, and was moved with compassion. "Poor little soul!" he thought, "I was sure there was a screw loose somewhere. Fancy preferring pens and ink to her!—what an infernal shame! By George, what a duffer Claud is!"

He felt quite a glow of virtuous indignation against his absent friend. "Of course he wants you," he said aloud.

"You think so? Well then, perhaps I don't want—" She broke off. "The truth of the matter is," she confessed, with a frank laugh, "that if I were to go back to Paris now, I should be a terrible burden upon him. We married in haste, as you know; and if we have not repented of the marriage itself at our leisure, we have at all events had some reason to repent of the haste. We are simply eaten up with poverty; and the longer I stay away the more we can economize in bread and butter—don't you see?" Then, as Freddy only looked concerned and answered nothing, she resumed: "I have come to the conclusion that Mr. Gervis was quite right, and that there should be no hurry about matrimony. I am sure you ought to be much obliged to him for giving you plenty of time to look before you leap. In nine cases out of ten, when it comes to be a question of marriage, the wisest plan is to think three times, and then not to do it."

She could hardly have stated in plainer language that she looked upon her own marriage as a matter for regret; and in truth there were moments in which she did so regard it. "As for you, you are not married yet," she said.

"I'm going to be, though," returned Freddy stoutly.

"You have thought that once or twice before, haven't you?"

She raised those beautiful gray eyes of hers to her neighbor's face with a look which sent a vague thrill and sensation of uneasiness through him. How handsome she was!—how thoroughbred!—how perfectly finished at all points! And how well that little air of mingled irony and melancholy became her! Freddy was more than ever convinced that Claud was a duffer.

Now, the perspicuous reader will doubtless have seen from the outset of this colloquy that Mrs. Gervis, despite her matronly dignity, had maintained, or reverted to, her old habits, and that, for reasons best known to herself, she was now pleased to exercise her fascinations upon one who had successfully resisted them in former times. What those reasons were I do not pretend to guess. Nina flirted, as a duckling swims, and it was by no means a necessary deduction from her doing so that she had any aim, definite or indefinite, before her. In the present instance, it is possible that she may have been to some extent influenced by the desire to score a point against Geneviève, whose cold reception of her advances she had never quite pardoned. Be that as it may, it is certain that Freddy himself had no suspicion of what she was driving at. He had never been in love with Nina Flemyng, and was not likely to become so now. When that period of courtship, which had so nearly culminated in an engagement, had come to an end, he had gone away for a few months, and on his return had met her as the old playmate and friend that she had always been to him; and it was in that light, and no other, that he regarded her now. Moreover, he was a loyal little fellow, and, setting aside his love for Geneviève, would have thought it a disgraceful thing to make love to his friend's wife. Nevertheless he returned Nina's gaze with one of those looks which may mean a great deal or nothing at all. And for my part, I am free to confess that I do not at all blame him in this matter. I have no hesitation in saying that I myself, for all my five-and-forty years, should have acted likewise under similar circumstances. I don't see what else he could have done. I don't see what else an archbishop could have done, even had Mrs. Archbishop been watching him from the opposite side of the room. *Œillades* of this description are like a Freemason's grip; you are bound to return them; and to ignore them would

be almost as discourteous as to cut a lady in the street. Their innocence or the reverse depends solely upon the significance lent to them by the persons concerned; and the same may be said of a shake of the hand or a movement of the head.

This exchange of glances took place, then, in accordance with rule and precedent, and was followed by nothing more romantic than a half-suppressed yawn on the part of the lady.

"How sleepy this air makes one!" she said. "What does one do with one's self here? You are out shooting all day long, I suppose?"

"I was to-day," answered Freddy.

"And all the other men too, of course. If there is a fatiguing thing, it's having to do the amiable to a lot of ill-tempered women; and almost all women are ill-tempered until after luncheon. I wonder whether they have got anything one could ride in the stables?"

"Oh, bless you, yes!" said the good-natured Freddy. "I'll find a mount for you to-morrow, and we'll go out and have a gallop. I'll let the shooting slide for once," he added generously.

"Oh, will you?" she exclaimed, brightening. "Now, that would be a really kind act. Do you remember our gallops on the Lynchester race-course ever so long ago? What fun we used to have! Does Geneviève ride? 'No; but she plays the fiddle.' There—don't be cross; I didn't mean to say anything disagreeable."

"But she *does* ride," cried Freddy, really indignant.

"Does she? So much the better then. I shan't ask whether she rides better than I do. I know I can follow you wherever you choose to go; and that is enough for all practical purposes; isn't it? I must not expect to surpass perfection in more than one accomplishment."

"Hang it! Nina," broke out Freddy, in a tone of great annoyance, "I believe you're jealous of her."

He did not intend his charge to bear anything but a general application; but she chose to interpret it otherwise. She was silent for a moment; and then—"Perhaps," she answered gravely. And this time she accompanied the word with a look which cannot be said to have been as innocent as her former one.

Was it a proof of very unwarrantable conceit in Freddy that he went off to the smoking-room presently in a reflective mood, and that, thinking over the above conversation, it should have occurred to him that this neglected wife might possibly be repenting of her choice, and regretting that she had not made better use of a certain opportunity of establishing herself in a

more congenial home? The upshot of his self-communings was that he was very sorry for Nina, and that he determined to be as kind as he could to her during the few days that they were likely to be together. *O sancta simplicitas!* At that very moment, if he had but known it, Mrs. Gervis and his hostess were sitting in their dressing-gowns before a blazing fire, disposing of him in a few perfectly candid sentences.

"He is a dear little fellow," the former was saying. "Dreadfully dull, you know—a little of him goes a long way—but quite the kindest-hearted creature that ever breathed. He and I have been sworn allies ever since the days when we used to make mud pies together as children. He is very anxious to take me out riding to-morrow; and I said I would go, if you did not object, and if you could spare me a horse. Where *did* you get that lovely old lace?"

CHAPTER XXX.

AMONG THE SAND-HILLS.

THE scenes, episodes, conversations, and so forth which make up this chronicle have, it is hardly necessary to say, come to the knowledge of the writer, not in their present consecutive shape, but at divers times and from sundry sources —a bit here and a bit there, after the fashion of those puzzle-pictures with which good children are allowed to amuse themselves on Sunday afternoons, and whose component parts require a little trouble and ingenuity to piece together, while some of them, as time goes on, are apt to be missing altogether.

In the forming of the picture now before you many gaps have had to be filled up by the artist to the best of his poor abilities. He has found himself compelled to put in figures which may very likely be a little out of drawing; he has shown his lamentable ignorance of perspective perhaps; perhaps he has thrown light upon places which a more skillful craftsman would have left in the shade, and *vice versâ*. I plead guilty in advance to clumsy workmanship and to a hundred blunders which have doubtless been apparent to the reader, begging him only to believe that upon the accuracy of the main incidents submitted to him he may implicitly rely; while as for details, it is notorious that a little license of fancy in that direction has ever been conceded to all historians, great and small. The invaluable assistance afforded to me by Miss Potts has of necessity been available for a portion only of the narrative in hand; Claud, who has a good memory, and, when in the vein, con-

siderable descriptive powers, has been unable to enlighten me as to certain particulars of which it is important that the reader should be informed; and it is obvious that some dialogues already recorded were neither heard by me nor reported *verbatim* by those who took part in them. Thus, in default of omniscience, I have ventured to fall back, every now and then, upon imagination, upon antecedent probability, and upon my knowledge of the persons with whom I am concerned. If the words which I have imputed to them are not precisely those that they uttered, it is demonstrable that they must have made use of others to much the same effect; and although I scorn to disguise the fact that I have never penetrated beyond the outer walls of that Lincolnshire mansion where we left two of our friends at the end of the last chapter, yet, from what has reached me from various quarters, I could, if it were necessary, draw a tolerably correct ground-plan of the building; while of the incidents that occurred there during the autumn days to which the sequence of events has now brought us, I have heard enough to feel sure that imagination may be trusted to fill up the blanks with a fair approach to exactitude.

Imagination, then—and no great stretch of it—will enable us to see Mrs. Gervis as she rides across the bare country with Freddy Croft, to catch echoes of what passes between them, and to watch the melancholy, though by no means uncommon, spectacle of an honest man being made a fool of by a pretty woman. Imagination will picture without difficulty the ease with which Nina, having made up her mind to flirt with her old admirer, persuaded that innocent to devote himself exclusively to her, and the opportunities which country-house life afforded for the carrying out of her purpose, and the mingled pity and amusement of those who looked on at this time-honored comedy. During the whole of the first day Freddy, being still under the impression that he was the object of an ill-starred attachment, bore himself towards his companion with a gentleness and subdued commiseration which, if she understood its cause, must have been infinitely diverting to her; but when he found that Nina was in the highest of spirits, and that she indulged in no more sighs or sentimental innuendoes, this view of the case faded out of his mind, and he yielded, half-unconsciously, to those bewitching female influences which had kept him more or less in hot water from his boyhood up. The notion that he was being guilty of anything like treachery to Geneviève did not suggest itself to him. Geneviève, in his thoughts, was raised upon a pinnacle far above the heads of womankind at large; love such as he felt for her could have nothing whatever to say to the sort of pastime with which he

and Mrs. Gervis, and perhaps three or four other couples at the same time and in the same house, were amusing themselves; and it would be in some sort an insult to her to suppose that his conduct with regard to these inferior beings could cause her any uneasiness, or to place her upon the same footing with ladies who, though charming in their way, were essentially of the earth, earthy. Such, at least, might be the answer he would have made to conscience, if conscience had accused him; but it is more probable that he neither analyzed his sensations nor took himself to task for them; but simply enjoyed the passing hour and what it brought, as his easy nature led him to do.

Nina, for her part, enjoyed her stay in Lincolnshire so much that she readily consented to prolong it. The life was of a kind that suited her better than any other. The party assembled in the house was composed entirely of young people, with a preponderance of young men; unquestioned liberty was accorded to all; what with riding, driving, and walking to meet the sportsmen on their return, the daylight hours were amply provided for; the evenings were given up to dancing and theatricals, and she had secured, in the person of the foolish Freddy, what she had always held to be essential to complete comfort in such situations, a cavalier set apart for her especial service.

This couple became so inseparable that if one of the company happened to ask, "Has anybody seen Croft?" he was sure to be met with a counter-query of "Where's Mrs. Gervis?" and the appearance of one of them without the other invariably gave rise to a fire of pleasantries which were not in the least resented by the objects of them. There surely could have been no great harm in so open and undisguised a flirtation; but the worst of playing with edged tools is that it needs but the slightest jog of the elbow to make the player inflict a nasty wound upon himself or the person nearest to him; and if Freddy, upon whom experience has always been thrown away, overlooked this danger, it cannot be pretended that Nina was equally unconscious of it.

The fact was that something more than inborn craving for admiration was at the bottom of Mrs. Gervis's reckless behavior. She had not been insincere when she had given Freddy to understand that her husband's evident indifference made her unhappy. She knew that the happiness which for so short a time had seemed to be within her grasp had slipped away from her forever; and though, with that curious candor and self-knowledge of hers, she had always foretold that it would do so, she had hardly anticipated so speedy a justification of

her prediction, nor was she at all inclined to admit that she alone was to blame for its fulfillment. She had forgotten her desertion of Claud in the hour of his tribulation; she had forgotten that it was by her will and suggestion, not his, that she was absent from him still; but what she could neither forget nor forgive was that he had never, by word or hint, expressed a wish for her return, that he was to all appearance perfectly content to live without her, and lastly—worst offense of all—that he could by no means be brought to exhibit any shadow of the jealousy which husbands surely ought to feel when their wives are gallivanting about the country in the company of other men. Could this be the same Claud who, only twelve months ago, had pulled a long face when, to tease him, she had given him a list of her former philanderings? She purposely sent him a glowing description of a certain renowned lady-killer whom she met in the west of England; and in his reply he never mentioned this dangerous individual at all. From Lincolnshire she wrote to him some account of her newly formed alliance with Freddy Croft; and in due course came a hastily written answer, in which Claud said that he was overwhelmed with work and had little time for letter-writing: that he was glad to hear that she was enjoying herself, and that she had forgathered with Freddy. "You two always got on well together," he observed, "and I should think that, between you, you are keeping the Lincolnshire people alive."

When Nina read these words, she crumpled up the paper and threw it away from her with a sudden gesture of exasperation, "Have it your own way then!" she cried; and if at that moment Freddy had proposed an elopement to her, I am quite inclined to believe that he would have obtained her consent.

Freddy was far indeed from harboring any such shocking intentions. Mrs. Gervis had succeeded in making his visit very pleasant to him; but if she imagined that she could induce him to postpone his departure by a single day, she had entirely mistook her man. On the 28th our young gentleman was due at Newmarket; and from Newmarket there was but one woman in the world who could keep him. But as the date of the first October meeting drew near, he was kind enough to say that he wished it could be deferred for another week. "I shall be awfully sorry to leave this," he declared; "we've had such a jolly time of it, and now there's an end of it all." And he pumped up a prodigious sigh.

Nina looked at him and laughed. "Don't try to put on a melancholy face," she said. "Keep that for next week, when you find you have backed the wrong horse. There is no occasion to look dismal because we are about to part. We shall

meet again before long, unless something happens to one of us; and if we were to live on like this much longer, the chances are that we should become utterly sick of each other. As it is, we shall be able, I hope, to say farewell with a proper amount of regret—which is something to be thankful for. To-morrow will be your last day, won't it? What do you mean to do?"

"Whatever you tell me," answered Freddy, gallantly.

Nina was standing in the bay-window of the drawing-room, which overlooked a foreground of undulating slopes, beyond which a vast and unbroken plain stretched away to meet the sky. A sort of silvery haze on the horizon gave an indefinite idea of the point at which those low-lying lands lost themselves in the German Ocean.

"I was thinking," she said, "that I should rather like to have a last ride—a really long one. Do you think it would be at all possible to get as far as the sea? It looks as if one might ride and ride, and never find one's self any nearer to it—as if it was somewhere beyond the edge of the world."

"Oh dear, no!" answered the matter-of-fact Freddy. "About fourteen miles as the crow flies, I should say; and one ought to be able to make pretty straight for it. It looks farther because the weather's rather thick. I don't see a bit why we shouldn't go there, and have a gallop on the sands too. The only thing is, it would be better to make an early start, so as to let the horses have a rest."

"I wonder whether we could set off directly after breakfast, and take some sandwiches with us."

"Of course we could. That would be first-rate."

"Only then perhaps some of the others would want to come with us."

"I'll tell them they ain't wanted," said Freddy cheerfully; and there is not the least doubt but that he would have carried out his intention.

But Nina said she thought it would be hardly necessary to be so explicit. "I dare say you will be able to make them understand," she added, with a laugh.

Freddy, it must be assumed, was equal to the emergency; for the next morning saw our two friends setting forth upon their expedition unaccompanied, their host shouting a few last directions to them from the steps.

"Stick to the Queen's highway, Croft; there's grass on both sides of the road everywhere. If you try cutting across country, you may get to some fences that will puzzle you. You'll find stabling at Mablethorpe, and I believe there's an inn, where Mrs. Gervis will be able to get a cup of tea, or something, if she wants it. By-by!"

Their way led them down the slope of the hills, through woods where the leaves were already beginning to flutter down with every gust of wind, past fields in which the harvesters were still at work, and so out at last upon the great plain. It was through a curious, un-English-looking landscape of flats and fens that they rode—a landscape mapped out into rectilinear fields and pasture-lands, dotted at rare intervals with solitary trees, and cut by the long white line of the high-road, and the black one of the railway, which converged towards the horizon, where the sea was no longer visible. At their backs, half hidden in pearly mists, rose the swelling wolds, whence they had come; but before them, and to their right hand and their left, the endless level spread itself, broken only by here and there a farm-house or a gray church-tower, seen far and wide. When low black clouds hang over it, and the heavy winter rains are streaming up from the southward, as from an inexhaustible reservoir, this country wears an aspect more wofully dismal than any one who has not seen it under such circumstances can well form an idea of; but under clear skies it has a charm of its own—the charm of space, the charm of the desert, or of the sea, when no land is in sight. Perhaps, though, it is at its best on such a still, misty morning as that on which our two equestrians made its acquaintance. Bright sunshine is a little out of keeping with its peculiar character; but gray weather, with distant shafts of lights, like Jacob's ladders, breaking through the clouds, and the hush of the dying summer brooding over all things, seems to suit its sobriety, and to lend it a kind of melancholy peace which, if it be not beauty, is not far removed from it. As in the land of the lotos-eaters it is always afternoon, so in these parts, one fancies, it should be always autumn.

Freddy and Nina, neither of whom was in the mood for studying scenery, were probably not conscious of this soothing influence; but the landscape pleased them—perhaps because they were in a good humor—and they agreed that, in respect of natural attractiveness, Lincolnshire had been much maligned. Both of them country-bred, they had a delight in rural surroundings, of which dwellers in cities are ignorant, and found a dozen trifles to remark upon where the uninitiated would have detected nothing. While they cantered along the wayside grass, Freddy scanned the wheat and barley with a farmer's eye, appraising their value and comparing them with his own, which had been carried some weeks before. Urged by promptings that we know of, he had latterly been devoting much attention to the duties of a landed proprietor, and was not a little proud of his newly acquired lore.

But as they went on their way, there was less and less to be said in favor of the crops; and soon these ceased altogether, and were replaced by poor, sandy grazing-lands and dikes, among which some half-starved horses were wandering and cropping the coarse herbage. And then—suddenly, as it seemed, though in reality the barriers had been visible miles away—a long range of low sand-hills blocked the travelers' path, and they knew that they had reached the sea. Here the road turned off abruptly at right angles; but Freddy spurred his horse, and breasted the natural earthwork, Nina following him. It was, as Freddy said, "a bit of a breather" for their beasts; for the ascent, though short, was sharp, and in that loose, heavy sand the horses floundered up to their hocks; but presently they were upon the summit, and, creeping gingerly down upon the other side, found themselves on such an expanse of firm sea-sand as is not to be met with everywhere. Far away were the white breakers of the ebbing tide; gulls were circling and swooping over the waves; a fleet of Grimsby fishing-smacks was in the offing; a fresh, salt-smelling wind blew steadily inland. Here were life and movement enough —a strange contrast to the still world that lay so near.

"This is glorious!" exclaimed Nina, drawing in her breath. "How I love the sea! And oh, what a place for a gallop! Freddy, I will race you to that point, and take your two to one."

But Freddy looked doubtful. "If I was riding one of my own horses, I'd lay it you like a shot," he said; "but we've come a goodish distance; and don't you think—eh?—"

"That it isn't quite the thing to distress one's neighbor's cattle? Perhaps not. Well, let us trot soberly off to the stables, wherever they are. What a bore it is that pleasant things are always wrong! I suppose it's the effect of the sea air; but I have a desperate inclination to do something outrageous. Do you ever feel like that?"

"Very often," answered Freddy. "And then, as a general thing, I do it."

"Just so; but I can't. We women are not allowed free play, as you are—more's the pity! A woman who respects herself must wear stays."

"If you come to that, a man has got to shave himself every morning. I don't see why you should have the grumbling all to yourself."

But Nina went on without noticing this interpolation. "I will say for myself that I have always recognized the bonds that we are born with, and submitted to them. No one can have stronger impulses than I have sometimes to snap my

fingers in the face of society; yet I defy my worst enemy to mention more than one instance in my life of my having given people an excuse to gossip about me. And even that one, if I had thought about it a little longer— But what is done is done. I wonder whether Geneviève ever feels a craving to do something outrageous?"

"I don't know, I'm sure."

"Of course she never does. She takes far too lofty a view of life and its duties to be guilty of such levity. I don't think she has ever forgiven me, or will forgive me, for having been married without a wreath of orange-blossoms. Her own wedding, I suppose, will be performed in the presence of a large assemblage, with solemn rites and full orchestral accompaniment, won't it?"

"Do you know," said Freddy, "I think, if you don't mind, I'd rather not discuss her."

Coming from Freddy, whose good humor was generally proof against any amount of raillery, this was a tolerably severe snub; but Nina did not resent it. She only laughed, and touched her horse with the whip.

"Very well, then," said she, "she shan't be discussed. We'll go and discuss some mutton-chops instead, if the natives can produce mutton-chops. I don't know how you feel, but I am ravenous."

By this time they had reached Mablethorpe, a diminutive watering-place which has sprung up among those rolling sand-hills, and enjoys some annual three months of semi-existence as against nine of profound torpor. The lodging-houses were deserted now, and the one-storied hotel displayed a row of closed shutters, behind which presumably the inhabitants were hibernating. Refreshment for man and beast proved, however, to be attainable; and Mrs. Gervis won the heart of the heavy-footed Lincolnshire rustic who waited upon the strangers by demanding to see her children, and presenting them with sixpence apiece to buy lollypops. For some reason or other, Nina was in wild spirits. She played hide-and-seek with the dirty little children; when they were gone, she gave a facetious imitation of their mother's gait and dialect; she chattered incessantly, and cracked jokes which, if they were not very novel, were not the less appreciated; insomuch that for the space of more than an hour, Freddy's jolly laughter hardly ceased to resound through the empty house. His own spirits were never at a very low ebb, and needed but the smallest provocation to become ungovernable. Give him a congenial companion, and Freddy was not the man to hesitate at burning the house down for the fun of seeing it blaze.

Nevertheless, before the afternoon was over, memories of his Latin grammar brought back the old adage of *væ tibi ridenti* to his mind. For Mrs. Gervis, like others of her sex, was subject to unaccountable fluctuations of mood; and when she and her escort started to walk down to the shore before setting out on their homeward journey, she became on a sudden absent and depressed, and returned no answer to remarks addressed to her. She may have been chilled by the prospect out of doors, which had changed somewhat for the worse. The light was beginning to fail; and as the sun sank in a yellow sky, barred with horizontal black clouds, the wind backed into the northwest, and threatened to rise, blowing in gusts, which rushed out towards the sea, driving pillars of sand before them. The fishing-smacks had made the Humber, and vanished; the tide was at its lowest; and the dark strip of sea, with its fringe of white breakers beyond two miles of wet sand, was out of hearing and almost out of sight. The whole scene was inexpressibly mournful. All sign of life had left it; and the silence of it was broken only when the wind, sweeping through the telegraph wires which connected the village with the railway-station, carried a low, wailing sound through the air, like an echo of far-away Æolian harps.

"I am tired," said Nina abruptly; "let us sit down."

She seated herself, as she spoke, upon the summit of the ridge of sandy dunes, with her back to the darkening land, which fell away till it seemed to reach a far lower level than that of the sea which in old times washed over it; and clasping her hands round her knees, gazed abstractedly towards the horizon. Freddy, stretched out at her feet, propped his chin on his hand, and contemplated her—a graceful, shapely figure, in her well-fitting habit, standing out against that pale sky.

"Well," she said at length, "why don't you speak? What are you thinking about?"

"I wasn't thinking about anything," was Freddy's perfectly truthful reply. "I was looking at you."

"Were you? What did you see, I wonder? Did it ever happen to you to fancy that you could see yourself, as if you were looking at another person?"

"I don't know that it ever did," answered Freddy.

"It happens to me sometimes; and when it does, I am filled with an immense pity for myself."

This sensation also was apparently beyond the limits of Freddy's experience; for he stared, and made no rejoinder.

"I see myself sitting before me," Nina continued, "and I think, 'Poor girl! there isn't much harm in her; but there never can be much good; and how can she help it?' Why

should we be blamed and punished for being what we were created? You know the fable of the Ant and the Grasshopper. I remember how, even as a child, I used to be shocked at the horrible injustice of it. The poor little grasshopper had chirped and made the best of things while the summer lasted: it wasn't her fault that she had been born a grasshopper, and didn't know how to lay up stores for the winter, any more than it was to the credit of the ant that she had been born an ant, and followed the ways of ants."

"But we are all born human beings," observed Freddy, who did not quite perceive the drift of his companion's remarks.

"The ant and the grasshopper were both born insects. Do you suppose there are not as many kinds of human beings as there are of insects in the world? You and I belong to the grasshopper tribe: we can chirp; but I don't know that we can do much else. Oh, Freddy, don't let us try to be anything but what we are! We may deceive ourselves for a time; but Nature is stronger than we, and the awakening has to come. People like Claud and Geneviève are altogether above our heads; they belong to a different species, and we can't mate with them. You won't let me warn you; it makes you angry if I venture so much as to mention her name; but I shouldn't mind that, if I could save you from the future. Can't you see that what has happened to me must inevitably happen to you too?—that sooner or later she will find you wanting?—that she will look down upon you?—that it will be as impossible for you to be happy with her as—as it is for me to be happy with Claud?"

Her voice broke; there were tears in her eyes; she was nervously plucking tufts of the coarse bent that covered the sand-hills, and casting them this way and that upon the wind. I have not the slightest doubt but that, at the moment, she meant every word that she said, and had worked herself up into the belief that she was entirely disinterested.

Freddy, whose tender-heartedness we are acquainted with, was much distressed, and knew not how to comfort her. "I'm awfully sorry," he murmured, taking the hand which she had allowed to drop by her side.

She did not withdraw it. She turned her gray eyes, swimming in tears, upon his face and—"Don't be sorry for me," she said; "my fate is decided. Think of yourself. Ask yourself, before it is too late, whether you have not made a mistake. If you had, it wouldn't be quite the first, would it? Sometimes, during the last week, I have thought that you—that I—that we *both* made a mistake once."

And then she drew her hand away, and began to cry softly.

And then—I am sorry to be obliged to record that then Freddy put his arm round her slim waist, and kissed her.

It cannot be denied that this was worthy of all blame. It is, I am aware, no excuse for the offender that the experiences of a short, but eventful, life had led him to attach little importance to such salutes, nor that in the present instance he had been actuated by motives of compassion rather than by love, nor that repentance followed close upon the heels of guilt. But in order to soften in some degree the hard heart of the reader (who, in a like case, would of course rather die than thus misconduct himself), I may perhaps be permitted so far to anticipate the sequel as to say that Freddy's momentary lapse met with as full and severe a punishment as the most rigid lover of justice could have desired.

CHAPTER XXXI.

EXCELLENT ADVICE.

KISSES, unfortunately, are among the gifts which may be returned, but cannot by any possibility be retracted; and as they are in many cases made to replace language, and are supposed to express an infinite variety of sentiments which there is a difficulty about putting into words, there is clearly some risk that the intention of them may occasionally be misconstrued by their recipient. These considerations should keep all wise and prudent men from kissing their neighbors' wives—at least, until they have made sure that their salute will be accepted in the same spirit as given. But young men are seldom wise and never prudent. Freddy Croft, in kissing Mrs. Gervis, had yielded to a not unnatural impulse roused by the sight of a pretty woman in tears. In much the same manner, if he had seen a small child tumble down in the street and break its toy, his good nature would probably have prompted him to pick up the unfortunate, pat her on the head, and say, "There, don't cry, and I'll get you another dolly." *Mutatis mutandis*, that, or very little more than that, had been the meaning of his kiss; but Mrs. Gervis saw fit to put quite another interpretation upon it. She chose to assume that it implied acquiescence in her last words—that, like herself, Freddy regretted her marriage and his own engagement, and that his eyes had been opened to recognize his natural affinity. Not then, however, nor until long afterwards, did she say this in so many words. Her behavior at the time was both dignified and discreet. Rising to her feet immediately, but without

absurd precipitancy or any show of virtuous indignation—"It is time for us to be going home," she said gravely.

During the long ride back to the wolds she made no direct allusion to what had passed; yet, when Freddy went up to dress for dinner, he knew full well that he had gone further than he had intended, and had been entirely misunderstood.

"I'm up a tree, I expect," he muttered to himself ruefully, as he brushed his hair; and later in the evening, when he had said good night and good-by to Nina, and she had whispered to him, "Come down to Croft soon; I must see you before I go abroad again"—he reiterated this artless figure of speech: "I'm up a tree!—by George, I'm up a tall tree!"

He had been up so many trees of this kind before—had been treed, and, by hook or by crook, had always contrived to scramble down again—not without loss of dignity, nor without bruises and scraped shins; still alive and free. In his happy-go-lucky way, he supposed that he would get out of this predicament also. He started for Newmarket with the wise resolution to keep as much as possible out of Mrs. Gervis's way during the remainder of her sojourn in England; but he did not keep this resolution for two reasons: firstly, because Nina adjourned her move to Paris until after Christmas, and secondly, because he lacked the requisite courage. When he went to the Moated House, he was received after a fashion that frightened him out of his wits. Nina seemed to take it for granted that he was dying for love of her; she let fall a few passing words about her duty, told him that she could not allow him to visit her often—not more than three times a week, at the outside; absolutely refused to listen to speeches which he had not had the most remote intention of uttering; and, in short, took up so determinedly defensive a position that he found himself involuntarily acting the part she had assigned to him, and making love, instead of running away. When he did go away for a time, she wrote to him; and on finding that he proposed to spend a week or two in London in the month of December she arranged to pay a coincident visit of a fortnight to an old aunt of hers, who lived in Eccleston Square.

It was at this time that I received a note, asking me to dine with my cousins, those Knowleses of Stone Hall who have been incidentally mentioned once or twice in these pages. They had come up to town, during the frost, to do shopping and the theaters, it appeared, and I was informed that I should meet my friend Mr. Gervis at dinner. He was in the drawing-room when I arrived, and extended his little white hand, with a gracious assurance of the pleasure it gave him to meet me again, after an interval of a twelvemonth, and to see me looking so

well. I replied that I was glad to be able to return the compliment; and he shrugged his shoulders apologetically.

"I am very much ashamed of myself," he said. "I continue, as you see, to inhabit the earth, to the great inconvenience of many people, and I cannot say that I am any worse in health than I was this time last year. At my age, and with the number of diseases which the doctors tell me that I am suffering from, I ought in common decency to have made myself scarce before this; but latterly I have consoled myself with the thought that, as it cannot be for my personal comfort that I am left in the world where it appears to be always raining or freezing, it must be as a humble instrument in the hands of Providence for somebody's good that I am spared."

He laid his head on one side, as he propounded this theory, and looked up at me from under his eyelids with that sidelong glance of his which gave him such a strong resemblance to a dapper old raven. In answer to my inquiries after his children, he told me that he had just returned from Paris, where he had left them both well; but he did not seem disposed to be communicative upon this subject.

"I myself," he said, "proposed to spend the winter at Southlands; but the draughts in that house must be felt to be believed in. After two days I took to my heels and fled. I have now given orders to the housekeeper to have heavy curtains hung over all the doors, and to keep a fire burning in every room in the house, night and day, until she hears from me again. In the mean time I have found quarters in a hotel in Jermyn Street."

I expressed a hope that he was tolerably comfortable there.

"On the contrary, I am intolerably uncomfortable; but I am near the Turkish baths, where I spend a great part of my time, and where at least I do not shiver. If I knew who the man was who first introduced Turkish baths into this unhappy country, and if he is still living, I should like to put him down for a trifle in my will."

Our conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Freddy Croft, who, I thought, looked rather taken aback when he recognized my neighbor. I was at that time ignorant of all that had taken place in Lincolnshire, and could not make out why Freddy answered Mr. Gervis's urbane observations at random, and kept biting his mustache and glancing nervously in the direction of the door. But I was to some extent enlightened when I heard Mrs. Gervis's name announced.

"You have done it now, Maria," I whispered to my cousin; "you have put your foot in it this time."

"Good gracious me!" she returned, "what is the matter? You don't mean to say there is a family quarrel!"

"Why, my dear creature," I said, "don't you know that they have never met since the marriage? Let this be a lesson to you not to ask Lynshire people to your house another time without consulting me."

But my cousin—with terror, no doubt, in her heart, and an engaging smile upon her lips—was already shaking hands with Nina, who had sailed in, looking exceedingly handsome, in a dinner-dress which I roughly valued in my own mind at fifty guineas, not counting the lace.

I confess that if there is a thing that I enjoy looking on at, it is an awkward encounter between two people who know how to behave themselves. Mr. Gervis and his daughter-in-law got through theirs in a manner highly creditable to both of them. I suspect that Nina must have had a moment of preparation as she advanced up the room; for she said, "How do you do, Mr. Gervis?" and offered him her hand without any hesitation or embarrassment. He bowed over it, perhaps a shade more profoundly than is customary in these days, and for a moment I fancied that there was a twinkle in his eyes, as if the situation rather amused him; but he half closed them directly, as his habit was, and the remainder of his features expressed nothing at all.

"I hope you have good news of Claud," said he, in his low, deliberate accents.

"Oh yes," she answered. "I heard from him a few days ago. He mentioned that he had seen you." And then she turned away to speak to some one else; and it seemed to me that Freddy, who had watched this meeting with evident apprehension, breathed more freely.

We had not been long in the dining-room before I began to gain an inkling of the complications with which the fortunes of the Gervis family were threatened. Freddy, who had taken my cousin in to dinner, had Mrs. Gervis for his left-hand neighbor, and from my position midway down the opposite side of the table I could observe the goings-on of this couple, which struck me as being eminently suggestive of mischief. Now, my aquaintance with Mrs. Nina dates from the days when she was a demure little lady in short frocks, and used to stir up envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness in the hearts of her brothers' school-fellows at children's parties, and I flatter myself that I know her little tricks and *minauderies* and the meaning of them as well as anybody. When, therefore, I saw her practicing these familiar wiles upon the young man at her side, and marked the shamefaced manner in which he responded to them—when I noticed the interchange of whispers and significant looks that passed between these two, and the

furtive and guilty glances which one of them kept darting in front of him, to his right hand and over his shoulder, I was able to form a shrewd guess as to how matters stood. And ere long I became aware that I was not the only person whose attention was directed towards this quarter. Mr. Gervis occupied the chair facing that upon which Freddy was uneasily wriggling; and I perceived that he was employing the intervals of leisure afforded to him by his own abstemiousness and the fine appetite of Maria in a prolonged study of the culprits. Judging by the expression of his features, he was deriving an immensity of quiet amusement from this occupation. First he inclined his head over his right shoulder, and took an exhaustive survey of them from that point of view; then he shifted it towards the left, and had a good look at them from another angle—for all the world as you may see that wise bird to which Mr. Gervis has been likened hopping round an object which has excited his curiosity before making a rapid peck at it.

After a time Mr. Gervis made his peck. "I suppose you know that Claud is about to produce another play?" he said, addressing his daughter-in-law abruptly.

If his object was to make her jump, he certainly succeeded. She was deep in subdued conversation when the sound of that peculiar voice, which was never raised, yet always distinctly audible, fell upon her ear.

"I—no; I had not heard," she answered in some confusion.

Mr. Gervis's eyebrows were raised ever so slightly for a moment. "Oh, indeed! Probably he intended to give you a pleasant surprise. The first representation is to take place in a few weeks, I believe."

"I am afraid I shall not see it then," answered Nina boldly. "Nothing is settled yet about my return to Paris."

"You do not like Paris, perhaps?" suggested Mr. Gervis blandly. "I am aware that some people do not. For myself, I think it is one of the few places in the world worth living in, and I should certainly establish myself there, if my doing so did not entail a residence in the Boulevard Malesherbes. I doubt whether the air of that quarter is suitable for persons with sensitive nerves. What do you think, Croft? You were in Paris in the spring, I understand."

At this Freddy grew very red. "I didn't go to the Princess's house," he replied, staring.

"Ah, no—to be sure! I was forgetting." And Mr. Gervis sank back in his chair.

For the next hour and a half he continued to behave in this way. The luckless couple opposite were never safe from him for an instant. In vain they affected to have nothing particular

to say to one another, and talked in needlessly loud voices about the hunting prospects; in vain they watched their opportunity, not venturing to resume their confidential intercourse until the enemy should be fairly engaged elsewhere. Without neglecting his social duties, he managed to keep his eyes—and for aught I know his ears also—open to their proceedings; and no sooner had he lulled them into a false security by entering upon suave political discussions with Maria—who is a scandalous Radical, I regret to say, and primed with recondite information as to the misgovernment of the country—than he would swoop down upon them with some innocent question or equivocal allusion which must have tried their self-control to the utmost. They came out of the ordeal pretty well, Nina especially displaying considerable powers of fence and repartee; but no doubt they hated the man in their hearts with a perfect hatred. I am sure I should have done so, had I been in their place.

But it was after the ladies had left us that poor Freddy's time of trial came. Deprived of his capable and courageous little ally, he was no longer able to hold out against Mr. Gervis's veiled sarcasms, and collapsed under them ignominiously. Not that anything of a very alarming nature was said to him; but I suspect that he recognized in Mr. Gervis only the mouthpiece of his own conscience, and that remorse, coupled with a distressing conviction that the man whom, of all others in the world, he would have wished to blind to his short-comings was reading him like a book, united to render that calm, ironical gaze more than he could endure. Be that as it may, he very soon abandoned the strife, and fairly took to flight. Making a feeble pretense of looking at his watch and being astonished at the lateness of the hour, "By George!" he exclaimed, "I had no idea it was past half-past ten. Promised to meet a man at the club at eleven. I think, if you'll excuse me, Mr. Knowles, I'll just slip off, without going upstairs again."

And so, bidding us all a hurried good night, he departed. We heard the hall door slam behind him presently; and I fancied him hailing a hansom, and being driven away, tearing his hair and cursing himself in his despair, like Ralph the Rover. If he passed a night of torments, he assuredly got no more than he deserved, and the sympathy of right-minded people cannot be claimed for him; but I, who knew him perhaps a little better than Mr. Gervis did, felt more sorry than angry at the turn which affairs had taken, and was pretty sure that Freddy was not the principal person to blame in this unlucky business. The histories of scrapes such as that in

which he was involved are so uniform in their character that it required no great inductive powers to trace this one to its source; nor was I at all surprised when my young gentleman turned up at my rooms, early on the following morning, with a very lugubrious countenance and a request for counsel and help.

He found me at breakfast; but declined to partake of my humble fare, giving me to understand that he was in far too acute distress of mind to think of swallowing food.

"I'll tell you what it is, Knowles," he cried, casting himself down heavily upon my favorite arm-chair, without the least consideration for its springs, "I've a deuce of a good mind to go and hang myself."

I begged him not to risk the bathos of being cut down and haled before the nearest magistrate, and suggested that, as a preliminary measure, he should make a clean breast of his troubles.

Such, he said, was his desire; and he proceeded accordingly, with much self-upbraiding and many outcries against the cruelty of fate, to a full confession of what occurred in Lincolnshire and subsequently, disguising nothing—not even that fatal kiss by the shores of the North Sea—and vowing (as I thought I remembered to have heard him do once or twice before) that, if he got out of this mess, no woman living, save one, should ever induce him to ride, drive, walk, or sit alone with her again.

When he had made an end of speaking, I cleared my voice, and addressed him at some length; and I felt it my duty not to deal over-leniently with him. By his own admission, I said, he had been guilty of something more than folly and imprudence. Not only had he been false to his engagements and the dictates of his heart; not only had he allowed himself to become involved in an intrigue with a married woman and the wife of his friend; but he must needs select, out of all the ladies in England, the one whose husband he hoped one day to greet as his brother-in-law. And all this at a time when his constancy was supposed to be undergoing a two years' period of probation! Comment upon such conduct was superfluous. Having premised thus much, I went on to make a good deal of superfluous comment; for indeed it is not every day that one has the chance of rebuking vice and folly, and haranguing sinners, as it were, from the judgment-seat of wisdom and virtue. I will say that he heard me in a becoming spirit of submission; and in due time I ceased scolding, and came to the chapter of practical advice.

I said, "Let us face facts. You have got yourself into a

most unpleasant fix, and you must not expect to find a pleasant way out of it. It is not pleasant, I allow, to say to a lady, 'My good madam, you appear to be the victim of an hallucination. I am no more in love with you than I am with Queen Anne. So far from that, I am, as you ought to be perfectly well aware, very much in love with some one else. Under the circumstances, don't you think we had better agree to bury the past in oblivion, and keep clear of one another, at all events as regards the immediate future?' I say, it is not pleasant to be forced to make such speeches."

"Good Lord!" groaned Freddy, "how's a fellow to say that kind of thing? One can't do it, you know."

"Nevertheless, my friend, you will have to do it. I don't say that you need use those exact words; but you must make the sense of them clear to her; and you must do it, too, in such a way as to render further discussion impossible."

"Oh, it's all very fine talking, and settling things in that off-hand style; but you don't consider her feelings."

"Her feelings! Why, you don't suppose the woman's in love with you, do you?" I cried scornfully, and perhaps a little unkindly.

Freddy scratched his head, and glanced up at me with a queer, deprecating look. "Well, you see—oh you may laugh as much as you please; I don't mind—I believe she's fond of me. Anyhow, she *says* she is."

"I dare say."

"Yes; and when a woman gives you to understand that much, you can't quite—you're in a sort of way obliged to—oh, hang it! you know what I mean. At first I thought she'd go away in a few weeks, and there would be an end of it; but then she put off her move till Christmas; and now, by George! she's put it off again; and I'm bound to go and see her, you know—and the long and the short of it is, Knowles—"

"The long and the short of it," interrupted the stern moralist to whom these halting confessions were addressed, "is that, having been fool enough to say some silly things which you never meant, you haven't the pluck to go back from them now, and prefer risking the best chance of happiness you have ever had, or are likely to have, to going through a disagreeable scene."

"You can put it in that way, if you like, I suppose."

"It doesn't greatly signify in what way it is put," I observed. "See here, Freddy; if you are really the poor, weak creature that you represent yourself to be, if you haven't the strength of mind to take the only straightforward course possible, you had better do as you did on a former occasion, and run away.

Go to Egypt or to India, and stay there until your Nina has returned to the domestic hearth. Of course Miss Gervis will hear all about last night's entertainment. You know better than I do whether she is likely to forgive you; but it stands to reason that she won't have anything more to say to you, unless you break with Nina directly."

Freddy shook his head despairingly. "There's no mistake about that: it's an awful business. But I don't quite see my way to making a bolt for it, all the same."

And when he was asked "Why not?" he could assign no more satisfactory reason than that there were some things a fellow couldn't do, you know. He stuck to this point with a persistency which surprised and puzzled me. I could not make out at the time, nor do I know now, what it was that rendered him so scrupulous. I do not believe that he was one whit enamored of Nina; but I think it possible that her witcheries, while missing his heart, may have reached some other weak point in his mental system—his vanity, perhaps. He appeared, too, to have imbibed some curious, distorted notion that it would be dishonorable to desert her in the way that I suggested. I expended a good deal of ineffectual eloquence upon him. I did not want to appeal to his love for Geneviève, and flatter him by dwelling upon the suffering that this treachery would bring upon her; but when, finding all other arguments unavailing, I finally made use of this one, the only effect it produced was to make him repeat his threat of hanging himself.

"There's no help for it," he sighed; "I'm a gone 'coon, I expect. I thought you, being a cleverer chap than I am, might be able to show me some way out of this; but it seems you can't. I shall have to let things take their course, and trust to luck."

His wrong-headedness put me out of all patience at last. "Go your own way, then," I said, "and the devil go with you! All I can say is that, since you are such a deplorable moral coward, Miss Gervis is well rid of you. Luckily she is young. She will get over this, and marry some better man before long, I hope."

He picked up his hat, and went away dejectedly and quite meekly. I was half inclined to call him back before he was down the stairs; but I resisted the weak impulse. I said to myself that there were some people who required to be ridden with a rough hand and a somewhat cruel bit. When he reflected over his situation in solitude, my harsh words would produce their effect, and he would see that this was no case for a compromise. If I had pointed out to him a more diplomatic and less violent method of freeing himself from his entanglement, would not his facile nature have led him to flounder

still more deeply into the meshes? I was obliged to tell myself all this in order to stifle certain painful misgivings that I had made a blunder. Alas! is not bullying always a blunder? I don't know whether anything that I could have said would have saved this misguided young man from the catastrophe towards which he was hastening; but I fear me that I did not make the best use of the opportunity that came in my way.

Freddy, as I afterwards learnt, went straight from my rooms to a house in South Kensington, where he had arranged to meet Mrs. Gervis at luncheon; and very likely he told her where he had been. Very likely, also, she found out from him as much as she cared to know of what had passed between us.

Shortly afterwards they both returned to their own county, where their intimacy was not long in exciting remark. In the course of a few weeks all Beachborough and its vicinity were ringing with this new scandal; and Miss Pennefather, having taken counsel with Mrs. Pender, had openly announced that, under existing circumstances, she should not care to be seen at the Moated House. What was Nina's object in thus damaging herself in the eyes of the world, and bringing misery upon people who had never injured her? It may, in the beginning, have been a spice of pique that urged her on; it may have been, as poor Freddy artlessly insinuated, jealousy of Geneviève, or, as my grandmother, with her customary plainness of speech, averred, "pure deviltry." Who can attempt to get to the root of the motives of female action? One thing is certain; that Mrs. Gervis's habitual respect for conventionality deserted her in the present instance. She seemed determined to brave public opinion, and to take a delight in parading Freddy, attached to her apron-string, under the shocked gaze of Beachborough. She took to frequenting the Esplanade at the crowded hour of the afternoon—a thing she had never done in her life before—and there she was to be seen daily, marching up and down, her supposed admirer walking beside her with downcast and hang-dog mien—a tragic-comic spectacle.

One day she was ill-advised enough to call upon Mrs. Knowles, by whom she was received with a grim stare, which I dare say in no way disconcerted her. There happened to be several other visitors in the room at the time, and the old lady did not address Mrs. Gervis until the latter rose to take her leave. Then Mrs. Knowles, to use her own expression, "spoke a few words to her for her good."

"I thought you were to have gone back to your husband before this," said she, in a voice sufficiently loud to be heard by all present.

"No; not just yet," answered Nina, sweetly. "He does not wish me to return until he has got a house for me." And in fact it was true that Claud's prospects entitled him to think of moving to a more fashionable quarter; and he had written to that effect.

"Oh, a house? And pray what is the man living in now? A tent?"

"He is living in the rue d'Amsterdam, Mrs. Knowles," said Nina, with increasing suavity. "Would you like me to give you the number of the house?"

"No, thank you. I can find out his address, if I should want to write to him, as I may do, perhaps, one of these days. If I were you I would go over and help to choose that new house. I am told that people of high rank are rather fond of keeping up separate establishments nowadays; but you will find that in the middle classes, to which you and I belong, it is still customary for wives to live with their husbands. I hope that, the next time you come to see me, you will bring yours with you. Good-by."

It is easy to imagine the glee with which this rebuke was listened to by Mrs. Bagshawe and her kindred tabbies, and the withering glances that were leveled at the abashed culprit as she made her way out of the room. Nina has since been heard to declare that, of all the insolent and ill-bred people who dwell in Beachborough, my revered grandmother is far and away the worst.

And now—Fortune apparently having a grudge against her that afternoon—she was to receive an expression of open censure from a more humble section of the population. From time immemorial it has been the custom of the Beachborough boatmen and fishermen to congregate in groups upon the pavement, chewing, spitting, making use of that forcible vernacular by means of which they have been taught to interchange ideas, and otherwise rendering themselves obnoxious to the passers-by. As Mrs. Gervis proceeded along South Crescent in the deepening twilight, she encountered a knot of these lazy fellows, conspicuous among whom by his high stature and broad shoulders was our old acquaintance Tom Burvill. They had had a fine take of fish in the morning, and Nina, yielding to an impulse with which I, for one, can readily sympathize, took out her pocket-handkerchief, and buried her nose in it, as she hurried past them. Now, Tom had been in funds lately, and at such times the Spotted Dog, the Red Cow, and the Jolly Mariners generally saw a great deal more of him than was good either for his pocket or his health. He had, as it chanced, recently emerged from the latter hostelry, where

he had been fortifying himself against the cold to such purpose that his heart was light within him, and he had become as one to whom the world is a smiling vale of brotherhood and class distinctions as though they were not. No inherited residue of the feudal spirit, therefore, deterred him from staggering out into the road in simulated alarm, when he noticed Nina's gesture, and calling out—

"'Ere, Bill, come off o' that theer pavement, will yer, and let the lady go by. You ain't good enough fur to breathe the same hatmosphere with that young 'oman. Bless your 'eart, nothink ain't good enough for she! Fust 'twas her 'ome as wouldn't do; now 'tis her 'usband. Dessay it'll be her name next."

Want of courage has never been one of Nina's failings. She turned round immediately, walked back a few paces, and faced Mr. Burvill.

"What is that you say?" she asked. "Just be so good as to repeat it, will you?"

"I worn't a-speaking to you, marm; I were a-speaking to my mate," answered Tom, a little abashed.

"Then, another time, when you and your mate wish to insult ladies in the street, you had better choose somebody else to talk about, unless you want to be given into custody. And, as I am speaking to you, let me recommend you to stick to fishing, my man. It is a more profitable business than loafing in and out of public-houses, or even than snaring game. I assure you I have not forgotten you; nor has my father. More is known about you than you think for; and I warn you that, after this, Mr. Flemyng will have his eye upon you."

"Will he now, marm? Well, as soon's ever you git 'ome, jes' you give my respeckful dooty to yer par, and tell him to keep his heyes for them as wants lookin' arter. He ain't the only man as has heyes; and if him and me was to tell all we knowed—why, 'twouldn't do neither on us much good."

Nina did not deign to continue the altercation. She walked away, with her head in the air; but she could not feel that she had got altogether the best of it. Truth to tell, it was nothing but pride that kept her from bursting into tears. She was one of those people to whom unpopularity is a grievous affliction; and this man's coarse insults, following upon Mrs. Knowles's lecture, were almost too much for her. What, after all, had she done to be treated with such cruelty? she demanded indignantly of space. If Claud did not want her in Paris, what right had any one else to interfere in the matter? As for her flirtation with Freddy, it had been a very innocent sort of flirtation, if people only knew. One must amuse one's self in

some way or other. Poor Freddy! he was a dear little fellow but he was not worth all this fuss. He had been very dull, too, lately, and she was beginning to get rather tired of him. "I think I will send him away to-morrow," she concluded.

Nevertheless, when the morrow came, she did not send him away. Upon further consideration, she had remembered that there was absolutely no other man in the neighborhood whom she could substitute for him; and as she had now no intention of leaving Beachborough before the spring, she decided to retain him at his post, pending the arrival of a relief.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A RECOGNITION.

FIVE people were sitting round the fire in the Princess Ouranoff's luxurious *salon*, one evening late in January. The lamps behind them were all shaded; for the Princess, like many other ladies whose beauty has passed its first bloom, had a weakness for subdued light; and the flames, as they rose and fell among the logs, illumining with sudden gleams the tapestry curtains, the old pictures in their heavy frames, the inlaid cabinets, the statuettes and bronzes, and all the costly extravagances with which the room was a trifle over-encumbered, illumined also five contented faces. Two nights before, Claud's new play had been produced at the Théâtre du Colisée with a success surpassing his utmost hopes, and the author had awoke, the next morning, to find himself famous. Therefore it was that joy reigned in this little family party. They had dined together, the Princess, Geneviève, Miss Potts, and Claud—M. Poinsot, who was the fifth person present, having become so unremitting in his visits to the Boulevard Malesherbes of late that they counted him as one of themselves—they had talked of little else than the play throughout the evening, and they were talking of it still.

"I feel as if I had written it myself," Varinka was saying. "If you knew the torments I have been suffering for weeks! You may believe me or not, as you please; but I have never been able to get a proper night's rest for thinking of what was coming; and now that we have gained the victory, I should like to illuminate the façade of the house for all Paris to see."

"We may all be allowed to claim our small share in the triumph," remarked Poinsot; "for I am sure we have felt our share of the anxiety. How is one to know what will please that great baby of a public?"

"If there has been a triumph," said Claud, "it is you whom we ought to thank for it; for, if it had not been for you, I should never have been able to get a hearing at all."

"Nonsense! What had I to do with it? I introduced you to Leroux a year ago, and I promise you that he cursed me for my officiousness, with tears in his eyes, afterwards. He accepted your play, this time, upon his own responsibility; and if I had said much in its favor, I believe he would have rejected it."

"A year ago!" echoed Geneviève, gazing at the fire; "it hardly seems so much. Is it really a year ago that we were all sitting here, just as we are now, talking over the chances of *Amour et Amitié?* One might fancy we had gone back twelve months."

"Except that we have to deplore some gaps in our circle," remarked Miss Potts.

"Ah, yes; poor M. Hirsch! I wish he could have been here. I know he would have been as pleased as any of us. I must write to him to-morrow."

"*Apropos*, where is he, that good M. Hirsch?" asked Poinsot, true to his rule of speaking well of everybody. "He was a man of—" Here M. Poinsot hesitated, searching in vain for some appropriate term of eulogy, and ended rather feebly with "amusing peculiarities."

The Princess made a grimace. It is possible that M. Hirsch, in his dealings with her, may have shown himself more peculiar than amusing. "He is at Nice," she replied, "where I hope, for the sake of his health, that he will remain. It is madness for him to attempt to live in such a climate as this."

"In that case," observed Poinsot, with perfect gravity, "we can but resign ourselves to doing without him. But he is not the only absentee. We all await with impatience the good news of madame's return," he added, with a polite little bow at Claud, as though he intended his civility, bow and all, to be transmitted forthwith to England.

The representative of the absent lady smiled pleasantly, without replying. The past six months had worked no small change in Claud both inwardly and outwardly. From a handsome boy he had developed into what he is now, a singularly striking and fine-looking man. His Roman characteristics had become more strongly marked. He had the large limbs, the stately bearing, the gentle, serious air, that distinguish that ancient nobility; but in the soft, ox-like eyes which were his birthright, there had sprung up a new light, not inherited but earned—the light of conscious power. He was not elated by

his recent honors; but he knew that he deserved them. He knew that he had something to say to the world, and that he had found out how to say it. He had emerged from his chrysalis; the task that he had imposed upon himself was accomplished; and he could take breath and look about him, and draw up some programme for the future.

Now, it is so far correct to speak of the period of his life through which he had just passed as a chrysalis stage in that, while it had lasted, his faculties had been so concentrated upon one aim that they had been virtually dormant as regarded all others. Voluntarily and deliberately he had given up his whole heart and soul to his work, telling himself that, when once the battle should have been fought, he would take up the threads of his existence where he had dropped them, renew the honeymoon of which the illusions had been so roughly dispelled, and begin a new and happier life with Nina. He had almost forgotten the manner of their parting; he had quite forgiven the little outbreak of temper and weariness which had led to it; he had seen nothing extraordinary in his wife's protracted absence, choosing to assume that she entered into his feelings, and, like himself, was only waiting for the dawn of a brighter day. I don't know whether such a state of mind is compatible with true love; but Claud unquestionably believed it to be so. And now, having awoke from his long sleep, he found himself a little bewildered and out of his bearings, and, searching about him for those dropped threads, felt, as might have been expected, some slight difficulty in laying hold upon them. He had sent a lengthy dispatch to Nina the day before, describing the favorable reception of his play, entering more fully than he had hitherto done upon financial topics, and proposing to her that she should shortly join him in his quest of some quarters more to her taste than those of the rue d'Amsterdam. Would she come? he wondered, or would she prefer waiting till her new home was ready for her to establishing herself again in that little fourth story with which she might well connect some painful associations? He was thinking of all these things while the mellifluous Eugène continued to roll out little civil phrases.

"It will not do to let madame attach herself too firmly to her native soil: she would be capable, perhaps, of robbing us of our author. She must be reminded that he belongs to Paris. now, and that he has friends there who will not consent to lose either him or her without a struggle," etc., etc.

"*Cette chère petite!*" murmured the Princess, who had long since ceased to think about her bosom friend of the previous winter, if she had not forgotten her existence altogether.

"What was that you were saying, Claud, about moving to these parts? I know of an adorable little *appartement* in the Avenue de la Reine Hortense—a genuine bargain."

Claud smiled: he had no desire to repeat the disastrous experiment of putting himself under Varinka's guidance in his choice of a domicile. "My ambition does not soar so high," he said. "I thought of Neuilly."

"Neuilly! What an idea! As if one lived at Neuilly! But men never understand these things. Leave it to me; and I will fit you up a little nest that you will be contented with. I will begin to see about it at once," cried Varinka, who, when she found it impossible to cram any more furniture into her own rooms, delighted in nothing so much as in acting the part of agent for her neighbors.

She drew out her ivory tablets, and began jotting down memoranda, talking all the time about the bargains one could effect by attending sales, the exquisite Louis XV. chairs which she had seen at a curiosity-shop near the Luxembourg, and which were to be had literally for nothing—for a mere song—and so forth.

Claud did not try to check her, knowing from of old the futility of such attempts, and she chattered on until, happening to catch sight of the clock on the mantel-piece, she saw that it was nearly the hour at which some of her friends might be expected to put in an appearance, and hurried away to add a few finishing touches to her charms.

While she was absent, a few of the men who possessed a standing right of entry into that hospitable *salon* strolled in; among others, Varinka's latest conquest, General Karakoff, a short, fierce-looking personage, whose high cheek-bones, small eyes, and retreating forehead betrayed his Calmuck origin. He professed a great admiration for the Princess; but it was generally understood to be rather a love of baccarat than of her company that caused him to be so regular an attendant at her informal receptions. He was not popular among his fellow-gamesters, being a man of high and peremptory ways, and one who bore losses in no meek spirit. About a dozen people in all were chatting round the fire when Varinka reappeared; and at the moment that she did so another gentleman in evening dress was seen entering at the further end of the room. No one recognized him as he threaded his way leisurely between the tables and chairs; but presently a flash from the burning logs disclosed the familiar features of M. Hirsch.

"You!" ejaculated the Princess in the same tone of dismayed surprise with which she had greeted our friend upon a former occasion.

"Alas! yes, madame. '*On en revient toujours à ses premières amours.*' You see how vain is the attempt to live away from you. I have been courting oblivion at Monte Carlo with the usual discouraging result, and I return to you for sympathy and consolation. You see before you a complete wreck —heart, health, and pocket, all at the lowest possible ebb," concluded Hirsch, with his old grin and his old paroxysm of coughing.

The Princess shrugged her shoulders, but made the best of a bad job. Most of those present were already acquainted with M. Hirsch; she introduced him to General Karakoff, whom he had not met before. That warrior bowed in stiff military fashion, and measured the intruder from head to foot with a searching look, as if he knew of something to his disadvantage. The General had no love for his traveling compatriots, the greater part of whom, he was wont to assert, were nothing better than adventurers; and this one, as we are aware, was not blessed with a physiognomy calculated to reassure the suspicious. Hirsch acknowledged the General's scrutiny with one of those ineffably impudent stares which he knew so well how to assume, and then, turning away, sank into an arm-chair beside Geneviève, who inquired kindly after his health.

"I thank you, mademoiselle," he answered; "my health is much what it generally is; that is to say, as bad as it can well be. The doctors tell me I may die any day; but they have been telling me that for the last two years, and I do not feel that I am any worse than I was in the summer—a little feebler perhaps. To confess the truth, I was not quite candid in what I said just now to our dear and amiable Princess. So far from having lost money at Monaco, I have been having an unusual run of luck there; nor was it for the pleasure of meeting her, nor because I had any anxiety that she should soothe my last moments, that I quitted that little paradise. I hope you will not think me very presumptuous, mademoiselle, if I say that it was a longing to see you once more that brought me back to Paris. When one has only experienced disinterested kindness from one person in the course of a lifetime, one cannot help craving for a repetition of the sensation. It is your own fault that you are annoyed by the company of an old vagabond. Tell me; have you good news from England?"

Geneviève did not reply for a moment; she was always a little shy of her odd confidant at first. But seeing that he had noticed her hesitation and looked hurt by it, she hastened to answer him. "You know, I never have any direct news," she said; "but Claud hears sometimes."

"And all is well? Come! I begin to see land. We are already well into our second year, are we not? I must make an effort to live to the end of it. I have a fancy that, if I could first see you in possession of all that you wish for, I could depart more willingly for—for wherever it is that we depart for. So our solemn D'Arblay is married, I hear."

"Yes," answered Geneviève, laughing a little. "They said it was a *mariage de convenance;* but I believe he is perfectly happy with his wife. I am so glad. I always liked him."

"So did I; although I believe he honored me with a noble dislike and contempt. To be sure, he was not peculiar in that. Do you know, mademoiselle, who is the only person, besides yourself, who has treated me like a human being since that evening when I first met you at your father's gates?"

Of course Geneviève knew; and of course she was ready to listen to as many praises of the absent paragon as M. Hirsch chose to pour into her ear. And so for a long time this wily sorcerer kept her enchanted with reiteration of the simplest spells—himself enchanted by her innocence, her freshness, and the halo of love and faith that was about her, as one who has been for years pent up in narrow streets feels his heart swell and tears rise into his eyes at the sight of the woods in spring.

Nevertheless, since acquired tastes are ever the strongest, and the indulgence of sentiment, though a sweet relaxation, cannot be trusted to satisfy indefinitely the wants of natures accustomed to more exciting stimulants, M. Hirsch began, at length, to move restlessly upon his chair, and to cast sidelong glances towards the violet velvet *portière* behind which three-fourths of the company had already disappeared; and Geneviève, perceiving his hankerings, was prompt to set him free.

She got up, saying, "I have kept you a great deal too long. Varinka will be wondering what has become of you, and will think you very rude if you do not join the others."

Whereupon Hirsch, with a deprecatory shrug at his own weakness answered, "Oh, rather than be thought rude!"—and withdrew, leaving Geneviève, her brother, and Miss Potts in sole occupancy of the room.

"I wish you would let us hear your violin, Gen," said Claud suddenly. "It is months since I have listened to anything in the shape of music, except that abominable barrel-organ which grinds out *Le pied qui r'mue* under my windows three times a week."

But Geneviève demurred, alleging that the card-players would hear her.

"What—through all those doors and curtains? And if they

did? I don't think they would be so much to be pitied, do you, Miss Potts?"

So Geneviève went away, and returning presently with her beloved instrument, played to them—subdued, flowing melodies, songs without words—and the souls of those three were filled with peace.

Did not all things, indeed, promise hopefully for them? And were they not justified in spinning webs of fancy, and dreaming dreams of the happy days to come? Even Miss Potts may have had her modest castle in the air, her vision of independence and three rooms of her own in the neighborhood of a London square, and of occasional visits to a certain country-house, where children with Geneviève's eyes would run out to meet her as she drove up from the station. For castle-building, happily, is not the prerogative of youth alone, and it would go hard with us mortals if we could not sometimes deceive ourselves with vain imaginations. These dreamers, therefore, sat comfortably nursing their several illusions until the fire had burnt itself down to a heap of white ashes and the hour for beauty-sleep was long past. Then the ladies went off to bed; while Claud, whose avocations had accustomed him of late to take his rest in the morning watches, sauntered towards the card-room.

He pushed aside the curtain, and passed into that hot and brightly lighted little room almost unobserved. Poinsot looked up, and nodded to him as he entered; but no one else seemed to notice him. The air was heavy and obscured with the smoke of the Russian cigarettes which Varinka used herself and provided for her guests. Claud helped himself to one, and, sinking down upon a divan, watched the players.

It was not a pleasing spectacle, nor one of a nature to promote respect for the rulers of creation. The Princess's friends were for the most part hardened gamesters, men of the world, who had long ago learnt to receive Fortune soberly and resign her gifts, without a frown, if she shook her swift wings. They would have thought it a disgraceful thing to curse and swear over their losses, like that barbarian Karakoff; and no doubt, in the earlier part of the evening, their bearing was as impassive as the laws of good breeding could require, while at no time did they offend by word of mouth. But as the night grew old, they were wont to lose, or relax to some extent, their command of countenance; and so it was that Claud saw a circle of faces very different from those which had surrounded him in the drawing-room a few hours before. Some were pale, some flushed, nearly all were somewhat agitated, and all wore a disfiguring expression of greed. M. Hirsch, who, judging by the

heap of gold and notes before him, had been winning largely, was perhaps the least altered of the company; but even he had a hungry, wolfish look. Varinka was almost hideous. She also was apparently among the winners; but the lust for gain was more strikingly marked on her features than on those of any of her neighbors. Her blonde locks were disheveled, her eyes staring eagerly at the cards, the muscles of her cheeks drawn up, disclosing her teeth; a multitude of lines and wrinkles showed themselves about her forehead and temples. She looked double her age at that moment. And yet Heaven knows that love of money was not one of her failings. Immediately after rising from the table, she would have handed over her winnings intact to any one who had chosen to beg for them, and would never have given the matter a second thought; but gambling was her ruling passion, and the demon of play her master. It consumed her, when she was under its influence, with a feverish craving to win; it made her eyes glisten and her slim fingers hook themselves at the sight of gold; it robbed her of all her graces, and metamorphosed her from a woman still young and attractive into a very hag.

Claud averted his eyes from her, with something of a shudder, to look at General Karakoff, who was only ridiculous. The General, whose luck, it must be confessed, was as bad as his temper, had lost a great deal of money, and took care that everybody should know it. His imprecations were poured forth in a continuous low growl, like the rumbling of distant thunder, rising, every now and then, into a louder explosion, as he dived into his pockets and dashed down the stake he had lost. He flung the money across the table to the winners as if he would fain have thrown it at their heads; his bloodshot eyes glared angrily about him in search of a quarrel. But these amiable little ways were too well known in the Boulevard Malesherbes to excite any attention; and it was only M. Hirsch who responded to the General's outbursts by an exaggerated politeness, by an assumed timorousness, and by grateful acknowledgments of the sums handed over to him, which redoubled, as they were probably intended to do, the ire of that luckless warrior.

"Don't thank me, sir!" bawled out Karakoff at last. "Do you think I wish to present you with my money, *sacre bleu?* You have won—so much the better for you, and the worse for me! There is no need to talk about it."

Varinka looked up, with a mechanical soothing phrase—"*Allons, allons, mon cher Général, ne nous fâchons pas*"—and the game proceeded.

After a time Claud wearied of the bull-baiting entertainment

provided by M. Hirsch, and perceiving that it was three o'clock in the morning and that no one showed any disposition to move, got up, stretched himself, and was preparing to retire quietly, when he was arrested by a singular exclamation—a sort of stifled roar—from General Karakoff. He turned round, and saw the General standing up, leaning across the table, his face purple, his bristly mustache twitching, and his right arm outstretched in an attitude of denunciation towards M. Hirsch. For an instant Claud had a horrible fear that that unprincipled person had been detected in the act of withdrawing a card from his sleeve; but it was not anything quite so bad as that, seemingly, that was the matter.

"I have it!—I have it!" General Karakoff was sputtering. "The moment I set eyes upon you, I could have sworn that I had seen you before; and now I know you. Look at me, sir! Do you recognize me?"

Varinka looked frightened; but Hirsch, who was perfectly unmoved, complied with the request addressed to him, and, after a very long and deliberate scrutiny of the General, made a slight negative gesture. "I never saw M. le Général in my life before," he said urbanely. "M. le Général has the happiness to possess a face which, once seen, would not be easily forgotten."

"Ah, you do not remember me! Think again—Karakoff, formerly lieutenant in the 40th Cossacks."

Hirsch shook his head.

"I will refresh your memory," cried the other.

He tore off his coat, threw it on to the chair behind him, and, rolling up his shirt-sleeve, displayed a hirsute arm, on which the scar of an old wound was plainly discernible. "Look at that! Ah, rascal! you gave me something to remember you by when your cursed bullet shattered the bone of my left arm. No thanks to you that I have all my limbs to-day!"

"I have shot so many men, first and last," remarked M. Hirsch languidly, "I do not recognize the arm of M. le Général any more than his face."

Claud could not help laughing at the man's cool impudence; but the Princess had turned pale, and was clasping and unclasping her hands nervously.

General Karakoff dragged down his shirt-sleeve, and put on his coat again. "Whether you know me or not, I know you," he said. "Gentlemen, that man is an escaped criminal—an assassin, who would have taken the life of the Emperor, if he had not been arrested in time. His name is Ladislas, Count Ponetzky—and he is the husband of the lady who sits beside him."

Here was a pretty disclosure! The silence of consternation fell upon the company; and it is to be hoped that the General enjoyed the success of his *coup de théâtre.* He looked round him for a minute or two with a malevolent smile of triumph; then, finding that no attempt was made to impugn his statement, he made ready to depart.

"Madame," said he, bowing low to Varinka, "I have the honor to wish you good evening. I am willing to believe that, at the time when you contracted a fresh marriage, you supposed, like others, that this miscreant was dead. I deplore your present unfortunate position; but I do not disguise from you that I shall denounce your husband at the Embassy in a few hours' time, as it is my duty to do."

And with that, he strutted out of the room.

The astonished gamblers sat agape, none choosing to be the first to speak. Varinka's little curly head was bowed down upon the table, her face hidden in her hands. Hirsch, with legs outstretched, hands thrust deep into his trousers pockets, and mouth widened from ear to ear, was staring straight in front of him into vacancy, and it seemed that consciousness of the humor which is an ingredient in all complete catastrophes was upon him. Thus they sat, with the scattered cards before them, each one silent and motionless in his place, like the guests of Polydectes turned to stone; and how long this painful situation was protracted, and in what manner it came to an end, and what was said, and whether anything was said at all—these are details of which Claud has never been able to render an account. All he knows is that, after a time, Hirsch and he and the unfortunate lady whom he could no longer call his step-mother were free from the presence of strangers, and that he had dropped into a chair opposite the couple, and was awaiting explanations in bewilderment.

Varinka, with her face still hidden in her hands, was sobbing out disjointed lamentations.

"What have I done that such cruel things should happen to me? .... Never shall I dare to show my face in Paris again! .... I will not survive this disgrace! I will drown myself in the Seine! I will open a vein in my arm! .... After all these years, and the money that I have spent, and the incessant anxiety and misery of it, that everything should be discovered at last by such an extraordinary accident! It is the most cruel thing that was ever heard of! .... And now, too, when it seemed as if the end might be so near!" she added, ingenuously.

Hirsch made a queer grimace at these words. "Too true!" he said. "It is a shabby trick of Fortune. I ought certainly

to have died last winter. One must admit that her luck has certainly been bad. I thought to myself that something must be going to happen when I saw how we both went on winning the whole night through."

He looked at the pile of gold that lay before him, swept it off the table and pocketed it, remarking, "There is a balm in the memory of having despoiled that hideous animal of a Tartar." Then, after a pause, "I suppose you will wish to have the history of this business."

Claud signified that, if quite convenient, he should like to have some further information; and M. Hirsch, having lighted a cigarette with some deliberation, leaned back, and composed himself into the attitude of one about to embark upon a lengthy recital.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A RETROSPECT.

"THE story of my life," began Hirsch—or Ponetzky, as he must now be called, "is an affecting narrative full of profitable lessons, which those who look below the surface of things might moralize and weep over by the hour together. I regret sometimes that it never occurred to me to write an autobiography, or at least to keep a rough diary, which might have been handed over, after my death, to some one like yourself, who could have given it to the world converted into graceful language and interspersed with fitting reflections. You would have found it interesting, I think, as a study of the gradual deterioration of a character not inherently depraved, under various adverse influences, of which want of money has been the first and foremost. Had I been born rich, I can see no reason why I should not have blossomed out into a philanthropist, and assuredly I should never have gained that disastrous knowledge of my fellow-men which led me, many years ago, to discard conscience in my dealings with them as a cumbrous luxury, fatal to all hope of self-advancement, not to say bare self-support. For, little as you may be disposed to believe it, it is a fact that I was once young, and as innocent as you are today. I am afraid you would hardly listen with patience to an account of my early years—which is a pity, as one would fain say a good word for one's self, and this is in all probability the last chance I shall have in my life of doing so; but I spare you, and will pass over all that I did and all that happened to me up to the time of my marriage with the Princess Ouranoff,

when I had lost my youth and had preserved only a few traces of my innocence.

"We met in Dresden, to which place I had moved rather hurriedly a short time before. I was not precisely a political refugee, since nothing had been proved against me; but I had had the honor of several domiciliary visits from the police, and I considered it best to step across the western frontier in order to avoid taking a longer journey towards the eastward at the expense of the Government. I had spent very nearly the last rouble of my patrimony; I was, as I always have been, unfit for any of the occupations by which men earn an honest livelihood, and I was seriously thinking of embracing the career of a highway robber, when the Princess appeared upon the scene, like a good fairy, and relieved me of all my perplexities. I married her uniquely for her money; not in the least degree out of love, which is a folly that has never troubled me much since my student days. I have, perhaps, the appearance of being a little ungallant in saying this in her presence; but we have no secrets from one another; and she found out long ago; what she might have known at the time, that nothing short of the direst necessity would have persuaded me into marrying a Russian. No! that is a thing that I would not have done—not if I had been as much in love with her as I understand that your father was. You, who were born free and belong to a free nation, it is impossible for you to conceive the hatred of a conquered people for its butchers and hangmen. It has been the strongest passion of my life; I believe it to be the strongest passion of which the human heart is capable. Even now—old as I am, and at death's door, and little as it can matter to me what happens in a world that I shall be out of so soon—I swear to you that if I were to receive an order to-morrow to go to Petersburg and kill one of their rulers, I would start on the errand with joy. I would have killed that brute beast of a Karakoff to-night, if we had met in South America, instead of in a Paris *salon*, and I would have gloried in it. *Abolissons la peine de mort, mais que messieurs les assassins commençent!* Yes! and did not the assassins of Poland merit death? Ah, if you had seen the infamies that I have seen!—fathers torn from their families, children dragged from their parents— Do you know how many Poles were sent to Siberia in the year 1832 alone? Eighty thousand—not less. Those are things which one does not forget."

The man's mean features were transfigured for the moment; his voice, ordinarily husky and low, rang through the room; he paused, trembling and gasping for breath. Then an access of his terrible cough laid hold upon him, shaking him as a

terrier shakes a rat, overpowering him, so that he sank back in his chair, his arms dropping and the perspiration breaking out upon his livid face.

A jug of lemonade stood upon the table. Claud poured some hastily into a glass, and handed it to him, and he drank it off; and so, with closed eyes, fell into a state of exhaustion so like death, that the Princess started up and peered at him affrightedly. Presently, however, he raised himself, and lighting another cigarette with a shaking hand, resumed:—

"At the time I was speaking of I belonged to a society of which I do not wish to say more than that its rules were not framed to suit people who like to live a quiet life and do what they please with their own. It was no sooner known that the millions of the Princess Ouranoff were in my clutches than I promise you that I had to give an account of them; and what with constant demands for money and sudden absences which I was unable to explain, it was not long before matrimonial harmony between my wife and myself was a thing of the past."

Varinka sighed heavily, and raised her eyes to the ceiling. "Ah, if that had been all!"

Ponetzky glanced at her. "Eh! she had other causes for complaint—who denies it? If ever there was an ill-used and unlucky woman upon the face of the earth, it is this poor dear Princess; and it is a fortunate thing that Nature has gifted her with a temperament which enables her to lay aside her troubles at a moment's notice. But there is no need to waste time in talking about that. Let it be agreed, once for all, that she married an unprincipled adventurer, and that she has had to suffer for her folly.

"It was in the autumn of 1858 that I made my way to Warsaw, where preparations were in progress for the great insurrection which was always hatching and always being adjourned, and which did not finally break out until five years later. I had done what was required of me, and was intending to slip quietly over the border again, when I allowed the police to get hold of me in the stupidest manner in the world. There is a vile spirit, distilled in the country, which was a snare to me in those days, and I dare say that it was because, from considerations of prudence, I had vowed not to let a drop of liquor pass my lips until I should be safe back in Germany that I let temptation to do the forbidden thing get the better of me. You will hardly believe that I was persuaded to sit down and drink with a couple of strangers; but so it was. I don't know whether they drugged me or not: in any case, it appears that I told them more than enough to settle my business; and when I came to myself, I was securely handcuffed in a dark cell. One

arrives at such positions by many roads; one leaves them only by one—that which leads to Siberia. You have heard of those melancholy processions of prisoners which are to be seen, from time to time, passing through the villages of East Russia, escorted by troops of Cossacks. The world has always dispensed a great deal of sympathy (which is a cheap article) upon these interesting exiles; some of whom, however, get through the journey comfortably enough, riding in sledges, wrapped in furs, by day, and sleeping in good beds at night. I was among those who perform it on foot, with an occasional encouragement to step out in the shape of a cut of the whip or a prick from a lance. I can tell you that, before I had been a week on the march, I had resolved fifty times to make a dash to escape, with the certainty of being shot down for my pains; for my feet were soft, and every step was an agony to me. Unfortunately for the Princess and for others, I delayed putting this design into execution from day to day; and destiny willed it that the cold should be so intense, one night, as to prevent me from sleeping on the floor of the wooden station-house where some hundred of us were huddled up, dead beat, after a long day's tramp over the snow. I was lying there, thinking what a sweet delight it would be to beat out the brains of the officer who was stretched across the doorway, snoring like a pig, when I caught sight of a horse-pistol which was lying on the ground beside him, close to his hand. On the wall was one of those lighted wicks floating in a glass of oil which one sees hanging before shrines. The feeble ray that streamed from this caught the brass mounting of that antiquated weapon, and gave me all kinds of strange thoughts. With presence of mind and a loaded pistol, one may go far. I fell to wondering whether it was loaded, and imagining what I would do with it if I could get hold of it, and picturing myself shooting the sentry outside and vanishing before the alarm could be given, till at last the desire to feel the thing in my hand became an irresistible craving which I had no choice but to obey. I crawled stealthily across the floor on my hands and knees, and presently I had grasped the pistol, and was kneeling beside the sleeping officer, listening to his heavy breathing. He was no other than the amiable Karakoff, it seems; but I never, to my knowledge, heard his name before I came to Paris, and as for his face, the Creator did not think it worth while to make more than one mold for those animals; and when I told the General to-night that his countenance, once seen, would not be easily forgotten, I only meant to imply that its ugliness would always make it conspicuous in civilized society.

"He troubled me greatly—that sleeping beauty. I calcu-

lated that, if I could get outside the door and shoot the sentry dead, the chances were about one in a hundred of my getting clear away; but to cross the threshold without moving that clumsy carcass was a sheer impossibility. In this strait an idea occurred to me. I bent over my Cossack, and began shaking him gently by the arm. When he opened his eyes, he saw me squatting beside him, with my finger raised to my lips, and the muzzle of the pistol within an inch of his forehead.

"How would you have acted in his place? As any intelligent being would have done under the circumstances, I imagine. You would have held your tongue, and recognized that I was master of the situation. But that Karakoff can never have been a man of the smallest *savoir-vivre*. He flung himself upon me, yelling as though the day of judgment had come; and I own that I was so unprepared for this preposterous behavior that I sprang back, and did not pull the trigger. I recovered myself, however, as the sentry rushed in. I fired, without aiming, at Karakoff; I saw him reel; I brought down the butt of the pistol with all my strength behind the ear of the soldier, who luckily had not all his wits about him, and I fled out into night, with the other Cossacks, whom the scrimmage had aroused, after me, like a pack of wolves.

"Never until that moment had I had any idea of the agility that was in me. The station-house stood, as those buildings always do, at the extremity of the village, and I had the sense not to make for the open country, where I must infallibly have been captured, but to dart down the street; and, what with the help of the darkness, what with doubling and crouching like a hare, I managed to baffle my pursuers for the time. When I thought it was safe, I headed back for the station-house, knowing that I should gain a little time in that way, and slipped across the road to a kind of farmyard opposite, where there were outbuildings and sheds and a mud wall which surrounded the village. I ran towards this wall, purposely making as deep footprints as I could in the hard snow, and as soon as I had reached it, I took off my boots, and stole into a shed, where I concealed myself behind a stack of wood. There I remained, shivering and three parts frozen, until morning. The Cossacks never came near me. I heard them galloping down the street and round the walls outside; but they did not enter the yard; and at length there was silence.

"If you think that I was rejoicing in my escape, it is because you have never experienced the effect of intense cold upon the courage. I do not mind telling you that, long before dawn, I had not a grain of spirit left in me. The convoy, I knew, would not leave the place before every nook and cranny in it

had been searched; to creep out into the country would have been certain death; and as for my finding any one charitable enough to take the risk of concealing me, that was a forlorn hope indeed. Still, it was the only one that remained to me. With the first streak of daylight, a woman came out of the house to get wood; and to her I disclosed myself, fully expecting that she would instantly fly across to the station-house and give the alarm. But she proved to be one of the few people I have met on my way through the world who have possessed both good hearts and good heads. Never a word did she speak; but she beckoned me to follow her into the house, and pulling up a trap-door in the flooring by an iron ring, pointed downwards.

"You may believe that I wanted no second bidding to hurry down the ladder which led to the cellar beneath. Presently this truly admirable woman brought me a loaf and a bottle half full of spirits, and whispered, 'Unhook the ladder, and drag it away out of sight.' This I did; and she immediately shut down the cellar-flap, and left me in total darkness. The bread and the good *vodki* put heart into me. I must have been some hours in the cellar, I suppose; but the time did not seem long; and at length I heard the trampling overhead which I had been expecting. The Cossacks had struck my trail; but, finding no footprints on the further side of the wall, had detected the trick, which indeed I had only intended to be a temporary blind. They had now settled in their wise heads that I must be somewhere in the house; and the consternation of my good woman at the idea that there could be a man concealed about her premises was a thing to listen to with delight. And then it was that her daring and wisdom became manifest; for, after taking them into every room and opening every cupboard in her establishment, she stopped of her own accord above the cellar-flap, and pulling it up roughly, let in a streak of gray light. 'What if he were down there?' cried she. 'How would you have a man jump into such a hole as that without breaking his legs?' asked a voice which I recognized as that of the captain in command of the troop. 'It is true! We never use the place; but it seems to me that there used to be a ladder there. Ivan, was there not a ladder here once?' 'You know very well,' returned a grumbling voice, which I took to be that of her husband, 'that the shortest ladder we possess is twenty feet long, and that is outside in the barn.' So the trap-door was shut down again with a bang; and my Cossacks marched out, leaving me rubbing my hands and praising the cunning of this worthy couple.

"However, there is no character but has its small defects;

and theirs was an excess of caution. For four days and nights they kept me down there in the dark, lowering buckets of hot water to me, to keep me from freezing to death, but refusing to listen to my entreaties to be allowed to return to the surface. 'All in good time,' they said; and I am bound to confess that in harboring an escaped prisoner under their roof they were exposing themselves to the chance of highly disagreeable consequences, and giving proof of a disinterestedness of which not many peasants would be capable. All this did not prevent me from cursing their prudence from the bottom of my heart; for to sit twirling your thumbs in a dark cellar, with the thermometer below zero, for ninety-six hours at a stretch, is the very devil; and if you doubt me, try ten hours of it, and see how it amuses you. When at last I did ascend from those infernal shades, it was clear that my good hosts were less anxious to listen to my assurances of gratitude than to get rid of me. To take myself off was the best return I could make to them for their humanity; and it is curious how often in my life I have found this form of thanks the only one likely to be acceptable.

"When I tell you that the village where these events occurred was situated some fifty versts to the eastward of Ekaterineburg—that I left it with literally nothing in my pocket, except seventy-five copecks, which the farmer handed to me, after a little hesitation—that it was long before I ventured to approach any city—that at last I reached Schistopol, which must be at least six hundred versts from Ekaterineburg—that I worked my way thence down the Volga and the Don to Taganrog, and that for two years afterwards I lived from hand to mouth in Turkey, in the Danubian principalities, and in Austria;—when you have realized the meaning of this, you will understand that I must have gone through adventures enough to fill a volume. I am not going to fatigue you with a recital of them. If a man wants to live, and can neither earn, beg, nor borrow enough to keep life in him, what is he to do? I have already told you that I was not overburdened with delicate scruples even in my prosperous days: in the course of those two years I may say, without flattering myself, that I became as accomplished a blackguard as could have been found in Europe. You will wonder, perhaps, why I never wrote to my wife. To tell you the truth I was cowed. I thought I had killed that officer, and I had no wish to fall a second time into the hands of the Russian authorities. Besides, I had broken finally with the past, as I thought. Circumstances had so degraded me, body and mind, that I could trace no connection between myself and the man who used to call himself Count

Ponetzky, and to put on a clean shirt every morning; nor did I greatly care about standing in his shoes. Give me plenty of brandy to drink, fools to swindle, and a roof of some sort or kind to cover me, and I asked for nothing more.

"It was destiny or chance, not any will of mine, that put me in a position to reassert my matrimonial rights. The great charm of an adventurer's life lies in its uncertainty and its swift leaps from misery to fortune and back again. In the year 1860 a run of luck landed me at Wiesbaden, with a decent coat on my back and enough money in my pocket to enable me to amuse myself at *trente-et-quarante*. I had not been there a week when I had the pleasure of seeing my wife enter the Cursaal on the arm of a gentleman of distinguished appearance. They looked so happy together that I was quite prepared for the information which was given to me at their hotel, that they were a newly married couple. I ought, you will say, to have vanished instantly. Not a doubt of it; but after what I have told you, you can hardly suppose that I should trouble myself much with the question of what I ought to do. What I did do was to waylay the Princess on her way back from the springs, the next morning, and to reveal my identity. Upon my word, I was very sorry for her. I heard from her that a circumstantial account of my decease had reached Petersburg, where I had been represented as having been shot dead while making a desperate effort to escape. It does a man no good, you understand, to admit that he has let a prisoner slip through his fingers; and I dare say the brave Karakoff got compensation for his broken arm. She offered me anything—everything—to go away, and not let myself be seen again; and naturally I had no objection to make to such an arrangement. But, on descending to details, we were unable at once to agree as to money matters, and so we had one or two interviews—which was imprudent and unfortunate. For it seems that, in the course of one of them, Mr. Gervis chanced to catch sight of us, with our heads close together, engaged in earnest discourse, and he formed the conclusion which I suppose that most husbands would have formed in such a case. When he questioned the Princess, she allowed him to think that his suspicions had some foundation: what could she do? I really regretted it extremely. Your father, it appears, is not one who forgives easily. You know upon what terms he and the Princess have lived all these years; and now you know the original cause of their breach. What additional causes may have arisen since, I cannot pretend to say—"

"There have been no additional causes," broke in the Princess indignantly—"none, at least, of the kind that you mean.

But you always believe the worst of everybody; it is your nature to do so. Claud, you see what this man has been to me—how he has spoilt my whole life. But he has not told you all. Ever since that day at Wiesbaden he has been a continual burden to me—and what a burden! *mon Dieu*, what a burden! If he had invested all the sums he has had from me, he would be able to live like a prince now. Often I could not give what he asked for—literally I had not enough. I was compelled to apply to your father: you may guess whether it was very pleasant to me to do that. That poor Gervis! I have said hard things of him sometimes, because he irritated me, and because he is a man whom one cannot make angry; but he has never refused me money, and he has never asked me questions. He detests me, and no wonder!—but, in spite of all that has passed, I shall always consider him as my husband. As for the other, he has told you himself that he is not the same man whom I married so long ago. Oh, if you knew the frights he has given me, the promises he has made and broken, the times and times when he has only wanted a hundred thousand francs or so to make his fortune, after which he was to trouble me no more. And then the same history over again! Would you believe that he bought mines—gold and silver mines—out there in Peru? A droll kind of mines! The gold went into them, instead of coming out of them, and it was I who had to supply it. And all this in vain! Am I not right to say that I will kill myself?"

Varinka fell back into her former despairing attitude, and Ponetzky, who, during this tirade, had been nursing his knee, and watching, with a perfectly unmoved countenance, the smoke from his cigarette as it drifted upwards, resumed:—

"The Princess has summed up the history of fifteen years with admirable conciseness, and has left me little more to say. I assure you it has been with unfeigned regret that I have caused her so much annoyance at different times; but necessity has no law. The silver of the Ural Mountains has found its way to the Andes, and has remained there. Who can fight against Fate? The uncertainty of mining speculations has been so brought home to the English nation of late years that I am sure I need not dwell upon the subject: my repeated failures explain themselves. I may, however, say that I should have kept my promise of not returning to Europe if, about two years ago, the Princess had not seen fit to break off all communication with me and to refuse me any further aid."

"I had sent you a fortune the year before, and you had promised that you would never ask me for more as long as you lived!" cried Varinka.

"Quite so. I am explaining my conduct, not justifying it. Now, it so happened that I was at the last gasp at that time. I just managed to pay my passage to Southampton, and landed in England almost without a *sou*. It was then that I made my way to Southlands on foot. From what I had been told, I fancied that I should find the Princess there, and when I learnt that she had left, I was at my wit's end. In fact, I was reduced to such extremities that the only plan I could hit upon was to try and get the price of his liberty out of Mr. Gervis. I accordingly informed him that I was in possession of an important secret, and that I would engage to set him free from his wife in consideration of a certain sum—"

"You did? You actually dared to do that?" exclaimed Varinka. "Is it possible that there can be people so wicked and so treacherous?"

"Which, however, he declined to pay; he was very insulting, I remember; and I was fool enough to lose my temper with him. Well; he has got his freedom now, without paying for it."

There was a long silence, during which Claud tried to collect his ideas. His chief feeling was one of great compassion for Varinka, upon whom the visitations of Providence seemed to him to have fallen with most unmerited severity; and what possible comfort could be offered to her in her affliction was a problem beyond his powers of solution. He had been scarcely shocked by the shamelessness of M. Hirsch, which had struck him as too exaggerated to be genuine; and indeed it may well be that that cynical gentleman had chosen to depict himself in his darkest colors; though I see no reason to suppose that he had related the facts of his history otherwise than correctly.

"I am more sorry for all this than I can tell you," Claud said at length.

"The fortune of life," remarked Ponetzky sententiously. "There is not much use in being sorry."

Not much, indeed. Claud rose, and took a turn or two up and down the room, stroking his chin in perplexity. "The question is," said he, "what is to be done next?"

"There is only one thing to be done," cried Varinka, starting up also; "I must leave for St. Petersburg instantly. The Emperor cannot refuse me an audience. That wretch will certainly go to the Embassy, as he said; and he will tell his own story. What a misfortune that he should have lost money here! They are sure to think that the whole thing is a plot. I wonder whether they will telegraph. In any case, his Majesty will see that I have lost no time—"

She stopped in front of a mirror, and uttered a cry of dismay —"Heavens! how frightful I look! This is the appearance

one gets by sitting up all night and abandoning one's self to these violent emotions. I wonder whether Annette is awake —I wonder how long it will take her to pack up?"

Already she had forgotten her threat of suicide. The color was returning to her cheeks; she was bustling about excitedly, eager to begin her preparations for a move. "I shall never see Paris again—never!" she exclaimed suddenly; and the tears rushed into her eyes again at this terrible thought. But she brushed them away. "I have not the time to cry. Yes; I must start immediately. Claud, there is an *Indicateur* in the drawing-room, I must take the first train."

"And you?" asked Claud, turning to Ponetzky, who was leaning back in his chair in a posture of calm repose.

"I? Oh, I shall return to Nice in all probability; but I am in no hurry. General Karakoff may denounce me at every Embassy on earth, if he pleases: it is not in their power to molest me. The Russian Government would not think of demanding my extradition; and if it were demanded, it would certainly be refused. The case of the Princess is different. She has estates, which are liable to confiscation, and she would act prudently in seeing the Emperor, and in convincing him—as no doubt she will do without difficulty—that she has had no share in any treasonable iniquities of which I may have been guilty, and that she deplores my existence as sincerely as any one can do. We are not likely to meet again after this, and I will now bid you good-by. If I might do so without too much presumption, I would ask you to take my farewell also to your sister, with the grateful thanks of an outcast whom her kindness has sometimes allowed to forget for an hour or two what he is. I will not ask you to shake hands with me."

The fact is that Claud did hesitate for a moment; and then, feeling ashamed of his hesitation, shook the poor rascal by the hand rather more warmly than he would otherwise have done; but without speaking. While he was casting about him for something to say which should not have either too severe or too priggish a sound, Varinka called to him querulously from the other end of the room—

"How long are you going to keep me waiting for that *Indicateur?* Take a candle and search for it in the *salon*. I know it must be somewhere about."

But there was no need for a candle. A gray light was making its way through the chinks of the shutters; and in the drawing-room Claud found an early housemaid, dusting and sweeping. When he returned to the card-room Ponetzky was gone, and Varinka had once more relapsed into floods of tears.

"I don't know what I shall do, or what will become of me!

I cannot bear to go away like this, and leave Geneviève—and it may be ever so long before we meet again! They will let her come and see me sometimes, will they not? She promised me once that she would never allow anything to prevent her from doing that."

Claud said he was quite sure no objection would be raised to such meetings. "But I think," he added, "I ought perhaps to take her to Southlands now."

"Of course you must. She could not remain here after I had gone away. How terrible it all is! That ill-natured, spiteful little ogre of a General! Was it not just like him to make a scene? He might at least have waited until the others had gone. I feel as if I should never be able to hold up my head again—never! Do you think people will laugh at me?"

"No; I don't think so. Why should they laugh?"

"They will—I am certain they will! And I hate to be laughed at. Why do not they have direct lines from Paris to all the principal places in Europe? One ought to be able to make one's journeys without changing carriages. Those railway people seem to take a fiendish delight in adding to one's discomforts. Not that it matters to me: I have done with railways. I shall go and hide myself among those horrible forests that belong to me in the government of Perm, and end my days there, seeing nothing but savages and wild beasts, like St. Basil. Is it possible, I wonder, to engage a *coupé-lit* at least as far as Berlin? I wish you would send somebody up to the station to inquire. Oh, and Geneviève will have to be told about this! You must tell her—I could not! It would break my heart."

After this characteristic fashion the Princess rambled on, while she studied her railway guide; and Claud sat patiently beside her, feeling that, since mute sympathy was all that he could offer, he ought not to bestow that small consolation upon her grudgingly. At length she sent the *Indicateur* spinning across the floor with a despairing ejaculation.

"Those trains are incomprehensible!" she cried. "Please go and see about sending somebody to the station. I suppose the men are up by this time. And when you have done that, you might bring Geneviève to me. Only be sure to let her hear everything first; my nerves are completely unstrung."

Geneviève and Miss Potts, who kept English hours, and breakfasted together between nine and ten o'clock, were not a little astonished to find Claud waiting for them in the dining-room, still in full dress, and presenting the unwashen, unshaven, and disreputable appearance of a man who has been up all night. He told his story as briefly as might be, and, having

conducted his sister to the dreary room where poor Varinka, in her lace and jewels, was seated among the scattered cards, the burnt-out candles, the empty glasses, and the cigarette-ashes of the night before, shut the door hastily, and left the two women together.

On his way out he begged Miss Potts to see that everything was got ready for an early start the next morning, and then hurried to the rue d'Amsterdam to change his clothes and make the arrangements which his own sudden departure rendered necessary. He sent an ambiguous telegram to his father, merely stating that something unfortunate had happened, and that he was bringing Geneviève home; after which he had to go to the newspaper office, the theater, and elsewhere; so that it was evening before he reached the Boulevard Malesherbes again, and found the Princess's carriage, and an omnibus loaded with trunks, waiting at the door.

Varinka was in the drawing-room, no longer tearful, but pale and subdued, like a child who has cried itself out—a poor little disconsolate figure in her heavy traveling-furs. The tender-hearted Miss Potts, touched by the sight of her loneliness, would fain have accompanied her to Russia, and when Claud entered, was still protesting, even at the eleventh hour, that she wanted but five minutes to put on her bonnet, and would then be prepared to start for Pekin, if necessary. But the Princess shook her head.

"I must always be alone now," she said, rather pathetically; "and I had better accustom myself to it."

Then came a painful scene of leave-taking. The Princess kissed them all in turn, begging them not to forget her, to write to her sometimes, and to forgive her if she had ever been unkind to them. "Because," said she, "I have never meant to be so."

Poor little woman! I think that statement of hers was truthful, as well as sincerely made. She clung a long time to Geneviève, but was far less demonstrative in her grief than Claud had expected her to be, and went away at last quite quietly, her face concealed under two thick veils. From the window they saw her step into her carriage, and presently she was driven away, followed by the omnibus containing her luggage and a small retinue of servants.

And so the old life had come to an end forever; and Miss Potts, looking round the deserted room where they had been so happy together less than four and twenty hours before, ejaculated solemnly, "It is well for the man Hirsch that he is not here now! I could not answer for myself if I were to find him within reach of my arm."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE LESSONS OF EXPERIENCE.

TO condemn our neighbors upon insufficient grounds, to misunderstand their motives, to start from false premises in judging of their actions, and generally to make a disastrous failure of our attempts at insight into character is so every-day an experience that those of us who have lived forty years and more in the world have grown accustomed to it, and find no great difficulty in pardoning ourselves for blunders of this kind. With our present imperfect powers and opportunities, we can but reason by appearance, analogy, induction, and so forth, and when these methods fail, and things prove to be not what they seem, the fault evidently does not lie with us. If, for instance, a man takes some pains to present himself to me in the light of a sneering, cold-blooded egotist, is it my business to seek out countervailing evidence, and to reveal that under an assumed mask of selfishness there lurks a modest man, whose pleasure it is to do good by stealth? One is sorry to have been too hard upon a fellow-creature, even in thought; but hard thoughts, when all is said and done, break no bones; and doubtless, by way of compensation, the generality of people think too hardly of us.

But to the young and candid mind consciousness of past injustice brings, as is most proper, some humiliation and remorse; and therefore it was that Geneviève, during the journey from Paris to Boulogne, did not cease to reproach herself for the hostility which she had maintained, all her life long, against her father. Seen in the light cast upon it by recent disclosures, all that had rendered his conduct odious to her in the past struck her now as not only excusable but honorable; what she had taken for vices displayed themselves boldly as virtues; and in the fullness of her penitence she constructed a suffering hero out of one who perhaps merited such a character as little as that of the unfeeling monster for whom he had hitherto done duty in her estimation. Was not that chill impassibility but another name for patient resignation? That perpetual irony, those caustic remarks, what were they but evidences of the noble pride which disdains to show its wounds? The truth was that Geneviève, while fully participating in the feelings with which her father must have seen his wedded bliss shattered, had forgotten, among other things, to take into account the healing processes of time, and had no doubt at all but that,

as soon as Mr. Gervis should have learnt that his wife had not been false to him in the way that he had imagined, the hardness of his character would melt, like snow in spring, and that he would look forward hopefully to that not far distant day when Varinka might once more be free, and when she and he and the children who loved them both might be reunited, never to be estranged again.

The repentant Princess had spoken much to her of his generosity, of his forbearance, of the love she had had for him in days gone by. Geneviève herself could not, on looking back, call to mind any unkind actions of his; and if there had been a somewhat conspicuous absence of kind words, she, at all events, was not entitled to regard that as a grievance. The memory of her obstinate prejudice astonished her. She admired Claud, who had known how to appreciate his father, and comparing her own conduct unfavorably with his, felt that nothing that she could do in the future could ever atone for the aversion and neglect of so many years. She had said as much to Varinka, who had not contradicted her. They had mingled their tears in a common contrition; and probably neither of them remembered, while thus engaged, who it was that had first set the girl against her father, and who had filled her young imagination with fables of spies and plots and the dark designs of a mysterious foe.

As regards these bygone accusations, I am inclined to think that, at the time when they were made, the Princess believed in them firmly—as firmly as she afterwards believed that the severance of the slack tie that bound her to Mr. Gervis was a profound grief to her, and that the dissimulation which she had found herself obliged to practice upon him had been the great burden of her life. It may almost be said of poor Varinka that a long course of mendacity had so honeycombed her moral nature that a true feeling of any kind was no longer possible to her, and that what she took for love, hate, grief, and remorse, and the like were but phantasmagoria of those sensations, retained by memory, summoned up by fancy, and brought into play as occasion might require. How far her attachment to Geneviève was genuine, how far it was a mere reflex of self-love, is one of those questions which observers of my humble caliber do well to leave alone; but it is certain that her sadness at parting with the latter was as near an approach to reality as anything about her could be, and that she had been honest in saying that she felt it as the chief of the misfortunes that had overtaken her.

Geneviève, too, was sad; but her sadness was mitigated by more considerations than one. Poor M. Hirsch, it was evident,

could not last long; and it seemed to her that, when once his troubles were at an end, those of many other people would be ended also. Moreover, the discovery of a father in the place of one who had only been a father in name was surely a subject for thankfulness. Nor would it have been in mortal nature to feel that an affliction which brought her nearer to Freddy Croft was altogether devoid of redeeming features. Geneviève more than forgave her father—she very nearly went the length of being grateful to him—for the ordeal which he had imposed upon her, and which was now entering upon its final term. It was, after all, a proof of affection. What more natural than that he, who, as he supposed, had been the victim of an over-hasty marriage, should desire to shield his daughter from the danger of a similar mischance? But when he should have been put in possession of the truth as regarded his own case, would not his opinion of human constancy necessarily change for the better? And would he not readily cease to oppose a match to which he had never professed to see any inherent drawbacks? As Geneviève sat in the railway carriage, she had many prophetic visions of a softened Mr. Gervis embracing his repentant child and extending the right hand of respect and friendship to Freddy Croft; of a happy family circle, into which even Nina was to be admitted upon terms of sisterhood, and of future golden days, when the past, with all its misunderstandings and heart-burnings, should be a thing to be looked back upon without pain.

Being in this tender and sanguine mood, it was something of a shock to her to be received at Southlands with all the cold formality which pertained to the old order of things. There is no express train from Folkestone to Beachborough, and it was not till between nine and ten o'clock that our travelers, tired and worried with the changes and delays of their journey, reached the latter place, and got into the carriage which was waiting for them at the station. Mr. Gervis did not come out to the hall-door to welcome them, on their arrival. They found him in the dining-room, sipping his Burgundy and perusing the *Pall Mall Gazette*, just as of old, and he rose languidly and shook hands with each of them, without displaying the faintest curiosity as to the cause of their sudden return. Had they dined? he asked; and on hearing that they had not, he rang the bell, and told the butler that dinner would be wanted in a quarter of an hour, he then reseated himself, observed that it was abominably cold and that they must have had a rough passage, and informed Geneviève and Miss Potts that they would find fires in their bedrooms. The ladies took this hint, and retired; and as soon as they were gone, Claud, who,

like most bearers of ill tidings, was impatient to get his task discharged and done with, opened fire.

"Governor," he began, "I have got some bad news for you."

"Then, my good fellow," said Mr. Gervis, "pray keep it to yourself until you have eaten something. I can wait; and so, no doubt, can your news."

"I think I had better tell you at once," said Claud.

"I think not," answered his father decisively. "Your doing so would only bring half an hour of great discomfort to me and to yourself; because, when the ladies came down, we should be obliged either to ignore something unpleasant that we all know of, or to talk about it—both of which courses would be objectionable. Whereas, if you will go away now, and wash your face (which, let me tell you, requires it), we can get through our dinner in peace, and confront calamity later with the antidote of tobacco."

So saying, Mr. Gervis returned resolutely to his *Pall Mall*. He had so completely assumed his company manner when Geneviève returned, and talked to her after so agreeably polite a fashion about music and Paris and other subjects of general interest, that she was compelled to postpone to some more propitious moment the delivery of those filial speeches which she had rehearsed by the way. Only, when she took up her bedroom candlestick, she could not help departing in one small particular from her general practice. She gave Mr. Gervis's hand a slight pressure, and said, "Good night—father."

It was the very first time in her life that she had so addressed him, and as he shut the door behind her, he turned to Claud with raised eyebrows and a queer look on his face.

"May I ask," he inquired, "whether you heard that endearing appellation?"

"Oh yes," answered Claud, laughing rather uneasily; "I heard. You don't mind, I suppose."

"Mind! My dear fellow, I am enchanted. I gather, however, from that, and from the portentous sighings of Potts, that I am about to be informed of a bereavement. Come to the billiard-room. We can smoke there; and I suppose we ought not to smoke in the library, now that we have ladies with us. I have furnaces kept up in every room in the house; and when I am alone, I spend the greater part of the night in prowling about from one to another and heaping on more coals. Allow me to direct your attention to that door-curtain," continued Mr. Gervis, who, while he had been speaking, had been slowly moving towards the billiard-room. "Feel the weight of it; observe how it is shotted at the bottom. I have defeated

some of the most piercing draughts I ever encountered in that way, and I think I may say that most of my doors are now air tight. As for the windows, the victory rests for the present with them. I have tried strips of felt, india-rubber tubing and sand-bags, all without any appreciable result, and if they do not bring about my death first, I mean to have those absurd sashes torn out and replaced by windows on the French system, which look better and can be made to shut if necessary."

Nothing could exceed Mr. Gervis's cheerfulness and amiability. To all appearance, he had not the faintest apprehension of the impending thunder-clap. He handed his son a cigar, remarking that one of the few advantages of living in England was that one could get real Havannas there by paying three or four times the proper price for them; he pointed out a neat little cabinet on casters, containing refreshment in the shape of soda-water and various *liqueurs;* finally he dragged a chair close up to the blazing fire, and sank into it, crossing his legs, screwing up his eyes, and surveying Claud with his head very much on one side and the air of a man who expects to be entertained by some novel or amusing exhibition.

But perceiving that Claud shifted from one foot to the other, and fixed a frowning stare upon vacancy, not knowing how or where to begin, he took pity upon him, and removing his cigar from his lips—"Allow me," said he pleasantly, "to offer you a helping hand. I guessed what must be the intelligence you were bringing as soon as your telegram reached me. The Princess has, of course, found her elective affinity at last, and vanished from the scene. I have always anticipated—"

"Stop, governor," interrupted Claud; "it isn't that at all. Don't say anything more; you might be sorry for it afterwards."

"Indeed? Then I confess that I am at a loss, and must leave you to tell your tale in your own way. But pray do not worry yourself over it. I believe I may safely promise you that nothing that you can have to say will cause me much distress. I am an ironclad—or rather I am an earthwork, into which any number of projectiles may be fired without making a breach."

Thus encouraged, Claud related, in an abridged form, all that he had heard from Hirsch-Ponetzky. He entered upon his task with some nervousness and some curiosity. He had not taken his father's boast quite literally, and indeed would have been sorry to believe him so callous; but in what way this news would affect him was more than Claud's knowledge of the man enabled him to surmise; and the glances which he stole, from time to time, at that white, impassive face told him nothing at all. But, as the recital proceeded, it became

evident that Mr. Gervis was more moved than he wished to appear. He allowed his cigar to go out; something like a sigh escaped him several times; once he raised his hand involuntarily, as if to shade his eyes, but, recollecting himself, let it drop again immediately.

"So that was Ponetzky!" he said at length. "And he would have told me all about it for twenty thousand pounds, poor devil! It is curious that I should not have suspected this—really very curious! I might have guessed—once, long ago. Perhaps I ought to have guessed. It is a fortunate thing that I did not, you say? Well, that depends entirely upon what one's definition of fortunate things may be. My own impression is that, if I had found out the truth at once, I should have been spared a good deal of—annoyance. And if that man had had the common decency to get himself shot by one of those yellow-faced South Americans, a good deal of annoyance would have been spared to others. But the longer I live, the more distinctly I see that everything invariably falls out for the worst in this worst of all possible worlds. I think, with your permission, I will bid you good night now; we will talk over this again to-morrow morning. You will want to be going over to the Moated House, I suppose?"

Claud said he had thought of doing so.

"Ah—well, don't go until you have seen me. Good night."

And so Mr. Gervis left the room with his slow, dragging step, looking, Claud thought, very old and bowed.

But at breakfast, the next morning, he had apparently recovered himself, and was unusually talkative. Varinka's name was not mentioned; but from several passing allusions, Claud, who came down late, perceived that the new order of things was no longer to be regarded as a secret, and that his father and sister had been already discussing it.

Mr. Gervis, indeed, admitted as much on the terrace, whither Claud and he repaired half an hour later. "Geneviève has been saying all sorts of kind and civil things to me," he remarked. "She thinks, it appears, that I have been a much-injured man, and that she, among others, has failed to do justice to my many sterling qualities; and so she is anxious to make a handsome reparation. She spoke very prettily. So did I. It is a pity you could not hear us."

Mr. Gervis paused, laughing a little, at the end of the terrace walk, and looked down the valley towards Beachborough and the sea, which were half hidden in the haze of a mild winter's morning. "There is something rather pleasant about these reconciliations," he resumed presently, "even though one knows that they are built upon sand."

"How built upon sand?" Claud asked.

"I mean that this is a reaction; nothing more. I have always had a—liking for your sister, and I dare say I have understood her pretty well, seeing that hers is not an incomprehensible character; but it is utterly impossible that she should either like or understand me. The last she will certainly not be able to do for a matter of ten years to come at least; by which time I shall have reverted to my original dust. At present she is pleased to take me for something that I am not, and probably never was. She tells me that that unfortunate Ponetzky is at the point of death; and I believe she is really looking forward to the day when I shall lead the Princess to the altar a second time, and bring her home to Southlands for a sort of senile honeymoon."

"You won't do that, I suppose?" said Claud interrogatively poking holes in the flower-beds with the point of his stick.

"Do you think it likely that I shall? Do you think the Princess would enjoy living here, or that she and I could play Darby and Joan with success? I admit that, if she had been your mother, it might have been our duty to sacrifice ourselves for the sake of our children; but happily no such necessity is laid upon us. We were virtually separated within a year of our marriage; we have been separated ever since; now we are legally separated; and I think we may exchange mutual congratulations upon our release."

Mr. Gervis had resumed his walk along the terrace while he was speaking. He now took his son's arm, and led him farther away from the house.

"You are not in a hurry?" he asked; and, without waiting for an answer—"Then let us take a turn through the grounds. Some time or other we must have a talk about family matters, and as the subject is not a very pleasant one, we may as well get rid of it at once, and not recur to it. I will not deny that the news which you brought me last night startled me, and that for some hours afterwards I almost felt, like your sister, that there had been an unhappy mistake, for which nobody was very much to blame, and that, some day soon, we might shake hands all round, let bygones be bygones, and live happily ever afterwards, like the people in the story-books. I need not say, however, that common sense reasserted itself before the morning. You must know that, a good many years back, I committed the folly of falling absurdly in love with the Princess. So far, no doubt, I may count upon your sympathy. It is true that I had not the excuse of youth; but then it is proverbial that there is no fool like an old fool; and the fact is that I was as much in love with my wife as—shall we say as you were with yours?"

"Don't use the past tense in my case, please," said Claud, laughing.

"I apologize—as much in love as you *are*. If, in the course of a year, I discovered that my angel had certain earthly proclivities, I turned my eyes away from them, like a sensible man; but when she distinctly gave me to understand that the man with whom I had seen her talking at Wiesbaden was her lover, what could I do? It seems to me that, considering what the circumstances were, I behaved remarkably well, and made far less fuss than most people would have done. Those who choose to make false statements must bear the consequences of them. The temptation to deceive me was strong, I allow; but you will hardly urge that it was my happiness that she had in view when she adopted that particular form of deception. I cannot, therefore, feel that she has left me much in her debt. To you I can speak more openly than I could to Geneviève; and I do not mind telling you that, even if this irrepressible Pole had never reappeared, I should certainly have had reasons before long for going my way, and letting the Princess go hers. She has accused me sometimes of setting spies to watch her. I never did anything of the sort; but you may imagine that there have always been plenty of good-natured people anxious to keep me informed as to all her—friendships, and the details of them. In short, if I had wished to get my marriage dissolved, I have no doubt that I could have managed it easily enough."

"Poor Varinka!" sighed Claud. "It is a pity."

"What is a pity? The pity is not that our marriage turned out badly—which it was absolutely certain to do—but that it ever took place at all. Matrimony, my dear Claud, is a deplorable institution. As a cause of human misery, I should rank it second only to drink; and I am by no means clear that it ought not to take the first place. In the present state of society it is, I grant you, a necessity; but I can well believe that in a more enlightened age it will be looked back upon with horror, as a senseless and degrading slavery, invented by semi-civilized man as a safeguard against immorality, but not even justifying that inadequate *raison d'être*, and itself profoundly immoral in the wider and truer acceptation of the term. For what," continued Mr. Gervis, stopping to face his astonished companion, "can be more absurd than the assumption that the woman with whom you have happened to fall in love is the one best suited to order your dinner, to sit opposite to you, all the days of your life, while you eat it, to nurse you when you are ill, to bring up your children in the way they should go, and all the rest of it? A year, or, at the most, two years of married life are sufficient to cure you effectually of a fancy

which might otherwise have lasted for an indefinite time; and then what remains to you? In all probability a woman whom you would have died rather than married, if you had known what she was."

"Well, but," observed Claud, "that does not seem to prove much against matrimony as an institution; it only goes to show that one should be careful whom one marries."

"Exactly so. I speak of the institution as it works to-day—not as it would do, if raised to an ideal state of perfection. Under the ideal system, one would, of course, marry the cook, provided that she were honest, sober, industrious, and cleanly, it being clearly understood that neglect of her duties would render her liable to divorce. But now consider what matrimony in its present shape means. It is simply a leap in the dark; and naturally it is apt to result in broken shins. The absurd custom is that, as soon as a youth has become enamored of a maiden, and has received her assurance that his affection is returned, the pair of them hurry off to get married, and to destroy the sweetest and most innocent dream of which our fallen nature is capable. When the man wakes up—which he does with marvelous celerity—he finds himself tied by the leg for life. And to what? Perhaps to a shrew, perhaps to a flirt, perhaps to a confirmed sulker or an absolute idiot. One in a hundred, we will say, discovers that he has espoused the ideal cook—the excellent creature, who will discharge her household duties with cheerfulness, devote herself to her children, and treat him, in a general way, as if he were the eldest of them. That man is happy and blessed. But the remaining ninety and nine are disappointed and disgusted. They have made an irreparable mistake, and it is a poor consolation for them to know that they have only themselves to thank for it."

Claud observed that he was acquainted with a good many married men to whom this description hardly applied.

"I agree," returned Mr. Gervis, "that the majority are unable to care very greatly about anything for long; but their lives are not the less spoilt because they have attained to a certain dull resignation. Let us, however, take the not very rare case of a man of keen sensibilities, strong affections, large capacities for happiness. Disappointment is apt to turn such a one sour."

"Perhaps it might not turn him quite so sour as he supposed," said Claud, who thought he began to see the drift of these general remarks. "But don't you think that, if he allowed it to do so, he would be making his mistake worse than there was any necessity for?"

"You have anticipated the very observation I was about to

make," answered Mr. Gervis placidly. "A wise man, when he comes to review the situation, cannot fail to see that he has no right to let such a poor thing as a woman be a permanent affliction to him. Women are only adjuncts of existence; the world belongs to the men; all of whom have, or ought to have, interests wholly independent of women in it. You, for example, would have your art, in which you have now a good prospect of excelling. A woman is, after all, no worse a torment than a full-grown, able-bodied flea. In some respects, indeed, she is less troublesome; for you can get rid of a woman at any time by the simple expedient of walking into the next room, and locking the door behind you; whereas the only sure way of escaping from a flea is to tear off all your clothes—which is not always practicable upon the spur of the moment."

"I think you're rather too hard upon women, governor," Claud's love of fair play prompted him to remonstrate. "Perhaps, if we heard their side of the question, they would have a word or two to say against us."

"A word or two? A million or two of words, more likely. Doubtless all humanity is reprobate; but you recollect the result of Solomon's search—'One man among a thousand have I found; but a woman among all those have I not found.' My own small investigations point to a similar conclusion. I confess that I have a poor opinion of women. If they do not deceive you in one way, they will in another; and even when they can no longer deceive you at all, they will not give up trying. Their whole nature is saturated with deceit; their very virtues are made up of it. The qualities that render a woman charming are nothing else than adroit humbug, pretense, and dissimulation. When you hear a man extolling his wife, you may safely conclude that he is an ass, and she knows it. I tell you a woman's life is one long course of duplicity from her cradle to her grave. *Splendide mendax* she may be, upon occasion; but *mendax*—always."

The writer feels quite shocked and alarmed as he sets down these disgraceful calumnies, and cannot help venturing to remind any ladies into whose hands this work may fall that the sentiments just recorded are Mr. Gervis's, not his own. The writer yields to no man in veneration for their sex. So great is it, in fact, that he has never yet deemed himself worthy of being allied to any member of it.

Claud was simply amazed by all this unwonted loquacity. He was made to walk along all the winding paths of the garden, up to the top of the hill, down through the wood, and back again to the house, Mr. Gervis holding him by the arm.

expounding and moralizing; and it was not until past one o'clock that our innocent hero began to suspect that his father had, for some reason or other, been talking against time. What helped to confirm this suspicion was the half-smothered sigh of relief with which Mr. Gervis consulted his watch, and discovered that the luncheon-hour was at hand.

"You will have to defer your visit to the Moated House til the afternoon," he observed. "By the by, shall you be passing through the town on your way?"

"I can do so, of course, if you have any commission that you want me to execute there," answered Claud; "but it is two miles round."

"So much as that? But you will avoid the muddy lanes by taking that line, and I suppose you are not in any very desperate hurry, are you? Would it inconvenience you extremely to take a note to Mrs. Knowles for me?"

"Not at all," answered Claud, wonderingly.

"Then I will give it you after luncheon. And would you be so kind as to deliver it in person? I think she may very likely wish to send me a verbal reply."

Claud promised to carry out these instructions; and in due process of time he was shown into Mrs. Knowles's presence, and handed her the square envelope which bore her name, written in Mr. Gervis's distinct little handwriting.

Now, this note is one among the many documents bearing upon the history of the Gervis family which have found their way into my possession. It lies before me on my writing-table at this moment, and I here append a true copy of it.

"MY DEAR MRS. KNOWLES,

"Will you do a charitable act, and say a few words to prepare this boy for the catastrophe which appears to be imminent? I find that my touch is not delicate enough for the task. I am anxious to prevent his finding his wife and young Croft together; for, between ourselves, he has a devil of a temper concealed somewhere about his inner economy; and one would fain avoid rows. By dint of the most exhausting efforts, physical and mental, I have kept him at home all the morning, and I have made an excuse to write to Mr. Flemyng, mentioning casually that he was here; so that there ought to be a fair chance of his finding Mrs. G. alone when he presents himself. He will tell you the reason of his return to this country. He has brought Geneviève with him. Upon the whole, it looks to me as if we were upon the eve of a *culbute générale.*

"Yours,

"V. G."

For a combination of shrewd common sense, honesty, and kindliness, I know of few people to compare with my grandmother; but with delicacy of touch I am unable to credit her; and that that skilled diplomatist Gervis should have based his appeal upon her supposed possession of this gift certainly sounds a little oddly. As, however, his utterances were seldom to be construed in a strictly literal sense, it may be that it was upon other grounds than those put forward that he had made choice of Mrs. Knowles as his co-operator; and, as a matter of fact, she acquitted herself of her task better than most people would have done. She read the letter and put it into her pocket, without remark; and when she had heard the whole story of the Princess and Ponetzky, and had delivered a few trenchant comments thereupon, she bent her head, so as to bring those sharp old eyes of hers to bear upon Claud over her spectacles, and attacked him point-blank with—

"Does it strike you that your father's system of going one way and letting his wife go another is a sensible one?"

"She wasn't his wife, as it turns out," Claud observed.

'Of course, if she had been—"

"If she had been, it would have been his duty to stick by her through thick and thin, wouldn't it? He had married a flighty little woman, and he must have known that, if she was left to her own devices, she would get into mischief. A man takes his wife for better, for worse, and it is his business to look after her. At least, that is my conviction; I don't know whether it is yours."

Claud said he believed it was.

"Then why don't you act up to it?" asked Mrs. Knowles, turning upon him with sudden sternness.

"I understand what you mean," said Claud, reddening a little; "but I assure you that mine is not a parallel case."

"Begging your pardon, I assure you that it is. Some women can't do without a man perpetually dangling at their heels, paying them small attentions, and so on. It is sheer meat and drink to them, and you can't deprive them of it. The Princess Ouranoff seems to be one of those women; and your wife is another. What possessed you to send her trapezing all over England by herself, and then to leave her in a place like this, where she could have nothing on earth to occupy her mind?"

"If you have anything disagreeable to tell me, will you please say it at once?" broke in Claud rather grimly.

"Well," answered Mrs. Knowles, after a short pause, "it is just this. Your wife has been going on in a way that doesn't quite suit the notions of the good folks hereabouts, and your father thinks you had better be told of it. That was what he

wrote to me about, if you want to know. He appears to have been afraid that, if the news were not broken to you gently, you might lose your temper and create a disturbance; but I give you credit for a little more sense, and therefore I tell you the truth plainly. There is no occasion to make a fuss over it. Be off to Paris as quickly as you can, and take your wife with you. And bear in mind that, if she has behaved a little imprudently, it is your fault as much as hers."

"Perhaps you are right," said Claud, sighing; "perhaps I ought to have foreseen this. If you knew all the circumstances, you might not think me so much to blame; but let that pass. I am much obliged to you for telling me; and I promise you there shall be no disturbance," he added, with a faint smile. And then he took up his hat to go.

"Stop a moment," said Mrs. Knowles. "We may as well have the whole murder out while we are about it. You know, idle young men are not quite as common as blackberries in these parts; and I suppose that when Mrs. Gervis felt it to be absolutely necessary that she should have somebody to walk up and down the Esplanade with her, she naturally gave the first choice to an old friend."

"Surely you cannot be speaking of Freddy Croft!" cried Claud, his face changing.

"Why not? Don't you think he is silly enough for that?"

Claud made no reply; but he tightened his grasp of the walking-stick which he carried significantly, and there came a look about the corners of his mouth which Mrs. Knowles, who was watching him, doubtless interpreted correctly.

"That's right!" said she. "Go off and thrash him—you are twice his size, and you will be able to manage it easily enough. And when you have succeeded in taking away your wife's character, breaking your sister's heart, and starting a scandal which will be talked about for the next ten years, come back here and report progress. I shall be curious to hear what step you will propose to take next."

"What would you have me do?" exclaimed Claud. "You appear to think very little of this; but to me it seems one of the most abominable pieces of heartless treachery I ever heard of. It is of Geneviève, not of myself, that I am thinking. I believe this will almost kill her."

"I don't suppose it will do that; but no doubt she will have a hard time of it, if you are determined to play the fool," returned Mrs. Knowles, dryly. "Well, it's an ill wind that blows nobody good, and Beachborough will be eternally grateful to you, that's one thing. How do you think of proceeding to business? Will you go over to Croft, and beard the mon-

ster in his den, or will you lurk about in the side streets till he shows himself upon the Esplanade, and then sally forth and administer the drubbing publicly?"

Claud turned white; and Mrs. Knowles, looking at him, thought to herself, "Oho! so the temper is there, sure enough."

But he kept it down.

"I don't think it is very friendly to turn me into ridicule when I am in trouble, Mrs. Knowles," he said quietly.

The old lady got up and laid her hand upon his shoulder. "I don't want to turn you into ridicule, my dear boy; I only want to prevent you from making yourself ridiculous, if I can. I know how you feel; and I acknowledge that, if I were in your place, I should long to lay my stick across that silly little fellow's back. There!—will that satisfy you? But you mustn't do it. You must think of others; for that is a gentleman's first duty, I take it. There is no more harm done as yet than can be set right by your removing your wife across the Channel. If you will only keep cool, and act like a sensible man, I firmly believe that all will come right; but you must try to think only of your sister for the present. I have no wish to say unpleasant things about anybody; but I suspect that Freddy is not the chief person to blame for this foolish flirtation. When once you are safely over in Paris, you can have it out with your wife; and if you choose to lock her up in a dark room for a day or two, and keep her upon bread and water, I'm sure I shan't blame you. Still, if you will take an old woman's advice, you will not be too hard upon her. When it is a case of two people spending their lives together, a little unearned forgiveness is a better thing than a well-deserved beating. Now go; and good luck go with you!"

It is to be regretted that these words of sage counsel should not have been the last that Claud heard before entering the Moated House. Unfortunately, Fate ordained that, just as he was turning out of South Crescent, he should meet an individual whose meddlesome tendencies have brought him into notice before this in the course of the present history. Tom Burvill was, I dare say, neither more vindictive nor more given to self-deception than his betters, and very likely he persuaded himself that he was only discharging a painful duty when, after respectfully greeting his old patron, he proceeded to put him in possession of certain facts which, as he said, were the talk of the whole place. So far, there would have been no great mischief done; for he had little to tell that Claud did not already know; but Tom, alas! was a man of scant refinement, and the terms of which he thought fit to make use in speaking of Mrs. Gervis and her goings on were more plain than ele-

gant. And then he chose to wind up with a most unlucky statement.

"They wus a-kissin' and a-huggin' under that theer cliff no later'n yesterday mornin'. Yes, that they wus!—I seen 'em," he declared.

Now, it really had not occurred to Claud that matters could have gone so far as this, and it must be acknowledged that, when he heard his disgrace thus blazoned forth by the mouth of a common fisherman, he forgot Mrs. Knowles's warning, forgot Geneviève, forgot everything, except his own cruel case, and started off up the hill with deadly rage in his heart.

CHAPTER XXXV.

IRA BREVIS FUROR.

THE Italian people, to whom Claud was indebted for many gifts beside his handsome face, have a wholesome dread and detestation of anger. They recognize it as not so much a sin or a folly as a malady to be shunned. *Mi fece far cattivo sangue*, they will say, almost pathetically, of one who has injured them; as though the rousing of wrath were in itself an injury more than sufficient. For to them anger means a great deal more than it does to us. It is indeed a *brevis furor*, a whirlwind of passion, paralyzing the will, obscuring the brain, and leaving him who has been attacked by it exhausted and ill, and often oblivious of what he has done while the fit was upon him. It is a steadfast belief of theirs that a man in a rage is not accountable for his actions. Hence that leniency towards all quarrels in which the knife is whipped out, and that determination to find an extenuating plea for every unpremeditated crime of violence, which so scandalize the sober British traveler. Claud, as he strode along miry lanes and across plowed fields, making straight for the Moated House, and swinging his stick as he went, was assuredly not master of himself; and it was well for the peace of mind of Mr. Gervis, who knew something of Italian blood and its properties, that he could not see his son at that moment.

The young fellow's head was swimming and all his pulses throbbed. There was a mist before his eyes, so that he blundered and stumbled continually, and found his way across country more by force of instinct than by purpose. As he neared his destination, sundry familiar landmarks, seen through that red mist, smote him with a sharp pain that gave the spur to his fury. There was the white park gate, with its trouble-

some, old-fashioned latch—the gate through which he used to ride twice a day in that far-away summer time; yonder, beyond the naked branches of the trees, was the stagnant lake, with the summer-house in which Nina and he had spent a certain memorable afternoon; and now the garden was in sight, and the spreading cedar-tree where her hammock used to hang, and the lawn where she had defeated him so easily at lawn-tennis. Seeing all these things, he ground his teeth, cursing the day when he had met her first, and pressed on.

Whither was he hastening so fast? and what did he intend to do? He has since confessed to me that he had not the faintest idea. "The truth is," he says, "that I was in a hell of a rage—if you will allow me to use a profane, but expressive, phrase—and knew no more whom I was about to attack than an infuriated wasp does. I wanted to get at somebody—that's all I know."

Such being his state of mind, it was fortunate that he could not make his way into the house without first ringing the bell, and that a brief space of time was thus afforded to him in which to recover possession of his senses. He had somehow fancied that he was descending upon that house like an avenging spirit, and that its guilty inmates would shrink away affrightedly on his approach; but the butler who opened the door for him manifested neither alarm nor surprise, having doubtless been already informed of the wanderer's return. He said Mrs. Gervis was in the "libery," he believed, and would Claud please to walk this way?

Thus our hero was ushered into the presence of his wife in the ordinary and conventional manner, and so far from displaying the noble anger of the lion, was conscious of entering the room with something of the appearance of having his tail between his legs. For Nina, as he perceived at once, was not alone; and he had enough of discretion left to shrink from making a scene before a third person. She was sitting beside the fire, and, oddly enough, she had on a costume of that same combination of brown and red as she had worn on the autumn afternoon which had just been brought back to Claud's remembrance. It was not the identical dress, to be sure—for when did Nina ever keep a dress eighteen months in her possession?—but Claud noted the coincidence, and forthwith a couplet started up into his memory;

> "I saw with half-unconscious eye
> She wore the colors I approved."

It was in all probability nothing more than a coincidence; but it served to sober him a little.

Mr. Flemyng, silver-haired and imposing, in his black velvet coat, stepped forward from the hearthrug, and held out a large white hand. Then Nina also arose, and advanced; and what was Claud to do? He says he doesn't know whether he kissed her or not, but supposes he must have done so.

"We heard from Mr. Gervis that we might look for the pleasure of seeing you this afternoon," began Mr. Flemyng in his pompous voice; and Claud immediately wondered whether Nina had purposely arranged that her father should be in the room when he arrived. Whether it were due to accident or design, the presence of this wordy old gentleman prevented what might have been a very awkward encounter; and during the endless oration upon which he embarked Claud felt all the passion that had been in him ebbing slowly away. He did not know what the man was talking about; he was conscious only of the well-known sound of those rolling syllables and of the booming chest-notes that were being hurled at his ears, and of a growing sense of the absurdity of the situation. The latter feeling increased to positive amusement when at length he came to an understanding of Mr. Flemyng's remarks, and realized that he was being voluminously pardoned for having run away with Nina more than a year before. He could not help glancing at his wife to see whether her father's unconscious irony was apparent to her; but she was holding up a fire-screen to shield her face from the blaze, and was scanning the flights of Cupids depicted upon it with that patient, far-away look which all who saw much of Mr. Flemyng soon learnt to assume; and it was impossible to tell from her manner how much or how little she heard of what was being said.

Mr. Flemyng talked on and on. Having exhausted the subject of runaway marriages, he now proceeded, out of compliment to his son-in-law, to discuss that of French plays, and criticised the modern school of dramatic authors somewhat disparagingly. France, he was pleased to say, was the only country in which the theater could be considered as still existent; but even France had sadly degenerated. She could boast, it was true, of a certain number of clever, but slight, writers, who enjoyed a not undeserved reputation. Their works, however, were scarcely designed to be other than ephemeral. Where was the Molière, where was the Corneille of the nineteenth century? (Molear and Corneal, he called them.) Claud observed that the nineteenth century had produced some painters, though there was neither a Raphael nor a Michael-Angelo among them; and he added that a modern Corneille would probably find some difficulty in inducing a manager to accept his long-winded sublimities, or a public to listen to them. No

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Mr. Flemyng, spouting lines from *Mêdée* and *Le Cid* in the most grotesque of Anglo-French, would have been a comical spectacle enough, if Claud had been in the humor to enjoy it; but it was not for such a purpose that he was at the Moated House, and he was beginning to debate seriously with himself whether he had not better say point-blank that he would be glad of half an hour's private conversation with Nina, when his father-in-law suddenly recollected that he had an appointment to keep in Beachborough, and, with many apologies for leaving so abruptly, took himself off.

Claud was now alone with his wife; but the denunciatory mood had passed away from him. He approached her slowly, and stood, with his elbow resting upon the mantel-piece, looking down upon her, while she continued to study her fire-screen. And so, for a few minutes, they remained, neither of them moving or speaking, each waiting for the other. At last Nina looked up.

"Well?" she said.

"Well," returned Claud. For indeed the horrible unpleasantness of the scene which he foresaw was beginning to make itself apparent to him, and he was sensible of a cowardly longing to stave it off.

"What has brought you back to England so suddenly?" she asked. "Mr. Gervis said in his note that you would explain."

"There has been a trouble about Varinka," Claud answered.

"Oh, a trouble about the Princess," said Nina, with evident relief in her voice. No doubt she had anticipated that the trouble, if there were any, would be found to relate to some one nearer home.

"Yes; everybody will have to know about it before long, so there is no use in making a secret of it. Her husband, Count Ponetzky, who was supposed to have been killed a year or more before she married my father, has turned up."

"You don't mean to say so! Poor thing! how dreadful for her! But at the same time, how interesting! Do sit down, and tell me all about it."

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related, as succinctly as he could, the circumstances which had made him decide upon bringing his sister home. "I should have written to you to say that I was coming," he added; "but there was not time; and I did not think it worth while to telegraph."

"Of course not, why should you? So that man Hirsch was really Count Ponetzky. What a sinister-looking creature he was! I wish I had noticed him more; but he was so rude and disagreeable that one didn't care about talking to him much. I always thought there was a mystery connected with him, and I knew he got money out of the Princess; but I never suspected the truth. I fancied he knew something about her; that he had been—that she had seen rather more of him in her earlier years, you know—something of that kind. I used often to feel very sorry for her."

"That I can quite believe," observed Claud meaningly.

She raised her eyes to his with a look of calm interrogation; and, in spite of himself, he admired her courage. She must have known that she was found out; but she never quailed under his gaze for an instant, and affected to notice nothing strange in his manner. Claud could not help remembering what his father had said of her sex in the morning—"Even when they can deceive you no longer, they will not give up trying."

"What about the new play?" she asked presently. "I hear the most glowing accounts of it, and a few days ago I read a long piece about it in the Paris correspondence of the *Times*. I kept the paper to send to you."

"Thank you," said Claud; "I have seen the paper; and you will soon be able to see the play, if you wish it; for we shall be in Paris within forty-eight hours."

"We?"

"Yes; you and I. We shall start the day after to-morrow."

"My dear Claud, what are you thinking of? I could not possibly be ready in time."

"I am sorry for it; because, in that case, you will have to do the impossible."

"I don't understand you," she said coldly. "I can be ready in a week, if that will do; or, if you cannot wait so long, I can follow you. As for my starting the day after to-morrow, it is out of the question. I have to go up to London to fit on a dress; and besides, I have several engagements here."

"Then you must break your engagements and have your dress sent after you," returned Claud curtly. "I am going back to Paris the day after to-morrow, and I do not choose to leave you here any longer alone. I don't know whether you wish me to speak more plainly."

For a combination of shrewd common sense, honesty, and kindliness, I know of few people to compare with my grandmother; but with delicacy of touch I am unable to credit her; and that that skilled diplomatist Gervis should have based his appeal upon her supposed possession of this gift certainly sounds a little oddly. As, however, his utterances were seldom to be construed in a strictly literal sense, it may be that it was upon other grounds than those put forward that he had made choice of Mrs. Knowles as his co-operator; and, as a matter of fact, she acquitted herself of her task better than most people would have done. She read the letter and put it into her pocket, without remark; and when she had heard the whole story of the Princess and Ponetzky, and had delivered a few trenchant comments thereupon, she bent her head, so as to bring those sharp old eyes of hers to bear upon Claud over her spectacles, and attacked him point-blank with—

"Does it strike you that your father's system of going one way and letting his wife go another is a sensible one?"

"She wasn't his wife, as it turns out," Claud observed.

'Of course, if she had been—"

"If she had been, it would have been his duty to stick by her through thick and thin, wouldn't it? He had married a flighty little woman, and he must have known that, if she was left to her own devices, she would get into mischief. A man takes his wife for better, for worse, and it is his business to look after her. At least, that is my conviction; I don't know whether it is yours."

Claud said he believed it was.

"Then why don't you act up to it?" asked Mrs. Knowles, turning upon him with sudden sternness.

"I understand what you mean," said Claud, reddening a little; "but I assure you that mine is not a parallel case."

"Begging your pardon, I assure you that it is. Some women can't do without a man perpetually dangling at their heels, paying them small attentions, and so on. It is sheer meat and drink to them, and you can't deprive them of it. The Princess Ouranoff seems to be one of those women; and your wife is another. What possessed you to send her trapezing all over England by herself, and then to leave her in a place like this, where she could have nothing on earth to occupy her mind?"

"If you have anything disagreeable to tell me, will you please say it at once?" broke in Claud rather grimly.

"Well," answered Mrs. Knowles, after a short pause, "it is just this. Your wife has been going on in a way that doesn't quite suit the notions of the good folks hereabouts, and your father thinks you had better be told of it. That was what he

wrote to me about, if you want to know. He appears to have been afraid that, if the news were not broken to you gently, you might lose your temper and create a disturbance; but I give you credit for a little more sense, and therefore I tell you the truth plainly. There is no occasion to make a fuss over it. Be off to Paris as quickly as you can, and take your wife with you. And bear in mind that, if she has behaved a little imprudently, it is your fault as much as hers."

"Perhaps you are right," said Claud, sighing; "perhaps I ought to have foreseen this. If you knew all the circumstances, you might not think me so much to blame; but let that pass. I am much obliged to you for telling me; and I promise you there shall be no disturbance," he added, with a faint smile. And then he took up his hat to go.

"Stop a moment," said Mrs. Knowles. "We may as well have the whole murder out while we are about it. You know, idle young men are not quite as common as blackberries in these parts; and I suppose that when Mrs. Gervis felt it to be absolutely necessary that she should have somebody to walk up and down the Esplanade with her, she naturally gave the first choice to an old friend."

"Surely you cannot be speaking of Freddy Croft!" cried Claud, his face changing.

"Why not? Don't you think he is silly enough for that?"

Claud made no reply; but he tightened his grasp of the walking-stick which he carried significantly, and there came a look about the corners of his mouth which Mrs. Knowles, who was watching him, doubtless interpreted correctly.

"That's right!" said she. "Go off and thrash him—you are twice his size, and you will be able to manage it easily enough. And when you have succeeded in taking away your wife's character, breaking your sister's heart, and starting a scandal which will be talked about for the next ten years, come back here and report progress. I shall be curious to hear what step you will propose to take next."

"What would you have me do?" exclaimed Claud. "You appear to think very little of this; but to me it seems one of the most abominable pieces of heartless treachery I ever heard of. It is of Geneviève, not of myself, that I am thinking. I believe this will almost kill her."

"I don't suppose it will do that; but no doubt she will have a hard time of it, if you are determined to play the fool," returned Mrs. Knowles, dryly. "Well, it's an ill wind that blows nobody good, and Beachborough will be eternally grateful to you, that's one thing. How do you think of proceeding to business? Will you go over to Croft, and beard the mon-

ster in his den, or will you lurk about in the side streets till he shows himself upon the Esplanade, and then sally forth and administer the drubbing publicly?"

Claud turned white; and Mrs. Knowles, looking at him, thought to herself, "Oho! so the temper is there, sure enough."

But he kept it down.

"I don't think it is very friendly to turn me into ridicule when I am in trouble, Mrs. Knowles," he said quietly.

The old lady got up and laid her hand upon his shoulder. "I don't want to turn you into ridicule, my dear boy; I only want to prevent you from making yourself ridiculous, if I can. I know how you feel; and I acknowledge that, if I were in your place, I should long to lay my stick across that silly little fellow's back. There!—will that satisfy you? But you mustn't do it. You must think of others; for that is a gentleman's first duty, I take it. There is no more harm done as yet than can be set right by your removing your wife across the Channel. If you will only keep cool, and act like a sensible man, I firmly believe that all will come right; but you must try to think only of your sister for the present. I have no wish to say unpleasant things about anybody; but I suspect that Freddy is not the chief person to blame for this foolish flirtation. When once you are safely over in Paris, you can have it out with your wife; and if you choose to lock her up in a dark room for a day or two, and keep her upon bread and water, I'm sure I shan't blame you. Still, if you will take an old woman's advice, you will not be too hard upon her. When it is a case of two people spending their lives together, a little unearned forgiveness is a better thing than a well-deserved beating. Now go; and good luck go with you!"

It is to be regretted that these words of sage counsel should not have been the last that Claud heard before entering the Moated House. Unfortunately, Fate ordained that, just as he was turning out of South Crescent, he should meet an individual whose meddlesome tendencies have brought him into notice before this in the course of the present history. Tom Burvill was, I dare say, neither more vindictive nor more given to self-deception than his betters, and very likely he persuaded himself that he was only discharging a painful duty when, after respectfully greeting his old patron, he proceeded to put him in possession of certain facts which, as he said, were the talk of the whole place. So far, there would have been no great mischief done; for he had little to tell that Claud did not already know; but Tom, alas! was a man of scant refinement, and the terms of which he thought fit to make use in speaking of Mrs. Gervis and her goings on were more plain than ele-

gant. And then he chose to wind up with a most unlucky statement.

"They wus a-kissin' and a-huggin' under that theer cliff no later'n yesterday mornin'. Yes, that they wus!—I seen 'em," he declared.

Now, it really had not occurred to Claud that matters could have gone so far as this, and it must be acknowledged that, when he heard his disgrace thus blazoned forth by the mouth of a common fisherman, he forgot Mrs. Knowles's warning, forgot Geneviève, forgot everything, except his own cruel case, and started off up the hill with deadly rage in his heart.

CHAPTER XXXV.

IRA BREVIS FUROR.

THE Italian people, to whom Claud was indebted for many gifts beside his handsome face, have a wholesome dread and detestation of anger. They recognize it as not so much a sin or a folly as a malady to be shunned. *Mi fece far cattivo sangue*, they will say, almost pathetically, of one who has injured them; as though the rousing of wrath were in itself an injury more than sufficient. For to them anger means a great deal more than it does to us. It is indeed a *brevis furor*, a whirlwind of passion, paralyzing the will, obscuring the brain, and leaving him who has been attacked by it exhausted and ill, and often oblivious of what he has done while the fit was upon him. It is a steadfast belief of theirs that a man in a rage is not accountable for his actions. Hence that leniency towards all quarrels in which the knife is whipped out, and that determination to find an extenuating plea for every unpremeditated crime of violence, which so scandalize the sober British traveler. Claud, as he strode along miry lanes and across plowed fields, making straight for the Moated House, and swinging his stick as he went, was assuredly not master of himself; and it was well for the peace of mind of Mr. Gervis, who knew something of Italian blood and its properties, that he could not see his son at that moment.

The young fellow's head was swimming and all his pulses throbbed. There was a mist before his eyes, so that he blundered and stumbled continually, and found his way across country more by force of instinct than by purpose. As he neared his destination, sundry familiar landmarks, seen through that red mist, smote him with a sharp pain that gave the spur to his fury. There was the white park gate, with its trouble-

some, old-fashioned latch—the gate through which he used to ride twice a day in that far-away summer time; yonder, beyond the naked branches of the trees, was the stagnant lake, with the summer-house in which Nina and he had spent a certain memorable afternoon; and now the garden was in sight, and the spreading cedar-tree where her hammock used to hang, and the lawn where she had defeated him so easily at lawn-tennis. Seeing all these things, he ground his teeth, cursing the day when he had met her first, and pressed on.

Whither was he hastening so fast? and what did he intend to do? He has since confessed to me that he had not the faintest idea. "The truth is," he says, "that I was in a hell of a rage—if you will allow me to use a profane, but expressive, phrase—and knew no more whom I was about to attack than an infuriated wasp does. I wanted to get at somebody—that's all I know."

Such being his state of mind, it was fortunate that he could not make his way into the house without first ringing the bell, and that a brief space of time was thus afforded to him in which to recover possession of his senses. He had somehow fancied that he was descending upon that house like an avenging spirit, and that its guilty inmates would shrink away affrightedly on his approach; but the butler who opened the door for him manifested neither alarm nor surprise, having doubtless been already informed of the wanderer's return. He said Mrs. Gervis was in the "libery," he believed, and would Claud please to walk this way?

Thus our hero was ushered into the presence of his wife in the ordinary and conventional manner, and so far from displaying the noble anger of the lion, was conscious of entering the room with something of the appearance of having his tail between his legs. For Nina, as he perceived at once, was not alone; and he had enough of discretion left to shrink from making a scene before a third person. She was sitting beside the fire, and, oddly enough, she had on a costume of that same combination of brown and red as she had worn on the autumn afternoon which had just been brought back to Claud's remembrance. It was not the identical dress, to be sure—for when did Nina ever keep a dress eighteen months in her possession?—but Claud noted the coincidence, and forthwith a couplet started up into his memory;

> "I saw with half-unconscious eye
> She wore the colors I approved."

It was in all probability nothing more than a coincidence; but it served to sober him a little.

Mr. Flemyng, silver-haired and imposing, in his black velvet coat, stepped forward from the hearthrug, and held out a large white hand. Then Nina also arose, and advanced; and what was Claud to do? He says he doesn't know whether he kissed her or not, but supposes he must have done so.

"We heard from Mr. Gervis that we might look for the pleasure of seeing you this afternoon," began Mr. Flemyng in his pompous voice; and Claud immediately wondered whether Nina had purposely arranged that her father should be in the room when he arrived. Whether it were due to accident or design, the presence of this wordy old gentleman prevented what might have been a very awkward encounter; and during the endless oration upon which he embarked Claud felt all the passion that had been in him ebbing slowly away. He did not know what the man was talking about; he was conscious only of the well-known sound of those rolling syllables and of the booming chest-notes that were being hurled at his ears, and of a growing sense of the absurdity of the situation. The latter feeling increased to positive amusement when at length he came to an understanding of Mr. Flemyng's remarks, and realized that he was being voluminously pardoned for having run away with Nina more than a year before. He could not help glancing at his wife to see whether her father's unconscious irony was apparent to her; but she was holding up a fire-screen to shield her face from the blaze, and was scanning the flights of Cupids depicted upon it with that patient, far-away look which all who saw much of Mr. Flemyng soon learnt to assume; and it was impossible to tell from her manner how much or how little she heard of what was being said.

Mr. Flemyng talked on and on. Having exhausted the subject of runaway marriages, he now proceeded, out of compliment to his son-in-law, to discuss that of French plays, and criticised the modern school of dramatic authors somewhat disparagingly. France, he was pleased to say, was the only country in which the theater could be considered as still existent; but even France had sadly degenerated. She could boast, it was true, of a certain number of clever, but slight, writers, who enjoyed a not undeserved reputation. Their works, however, were scarcely designed to be other than ephemeral. Where was the Molière, where was the Corneille of the nineteenth century? (Molear and Corneal, he called them.) Claud observed that the nineteenth century had produced some painters, though there was neither a Raphael nor a Michael-Angelo among them; and he added that a modern Corneille would probably find some difficulty in inducing a manager to accept his long-winded sublimities, or a public to listen to them. No

sooner had he uttered this rash criticism than he perceived the trap into which he had fallen; for Mr. Flemyng promptly let loose upon him such a flood of quotations, assisted by appropriate elocution and action, that there was no room for doubt that he had been leading up to this point, and that he was fresh from a perusal of the works—or, more probably, of an essay upon the works—of that eminent man.

Mr. Flemyng, spouting lines from *Médée* and *Le Cid* in the most grotesque of Anglo-French, would have been a comical spectacle enough, if Claud had been in the humor to enjoy it; but it was not for such a purpose that he was at the Moated House, and he was beginning to debate seriously with himself whether he had not better say point-blank that he would be glad of half an hour's private conversation with Nina, when his father-in-law suddenly recollected that he had an appointment to keep in Beachborough, and, with many apologies for leaving so abruptly, took himself off.

Claud was now alone with his wife; but the denunciatory mood had passed away from him. He approached her slowly, and stood, with his elbow resting upon the mantel-piece, looking down upon her, while she continued to study her fire-screen. And so, for a few minutes, they remained, neither of them moving or speaking, each waiting for the other. At last Nina looked up.

"Well?" she said.

"Well," returned Claud. For indeed the horrible unpleasantness of the scene which he foresaw was beginning to make itself apparent to him, and he was sensible of a cowardly longing to stave it off.

"What has brought you back to England so suddenly?" she asked. "Mr. Gervis said in his note that you would explain."

"There has been a trouble about Varinka," Claud answered.

"Oh, a trouble about the Princess," said Nina, with evident relief in her voice. No doubt she had anticipated that the trouble, if there were any, would be found to relate to some one nearer home.

"Yes; everybody will have to know about it before long, so there is no use in making a secret of it. Her husband, Count Ponetzky, who was supposed to have been killed a year or more before she married my father, has turned up."

"You don't mean to say so! Poor thing! how dreadful for her! But at the same time, how interesting! Do sit down, and tell me all about it."

Claud did not sit down—he had a feeling that it would be easier to say what must presently be said standing—but he

related, as succinctly as he could, the circumstances which had made him decide upon bringing his sister home. "I should have written to you to say that I was coming," he added; "but there was not time; and I did not think it worth while to telegraph."

"Of course not, why should you? So that man Hirsch was really Count Ponetzky. What a sinister-looking creature he was! I wish I had noticed him more; but he was so rude and disagreeable that one didn't care about talking to him much. I always thought there was a mystery connected with him, and I knew he got money out of the Princess; but I never suspected the truth. I fancied he knew something about her; that he had been—that she had seen rather more of him in her earlier years, you know—something of that kind. I used often to feel very sorry for her."

"That I can quite believe," observed Claud meaningly.

She raised her eyes to his with a look of calm interrogation; and, in spite of himself, he admired her courage. She must have known that she was found out; but she never quailed under his gaze for an instant, and affected to notice nothing strange in his manner. Claud could not help remembering what his father had said of her sex in the morning—"Even when they can deceive you no longer, they will not give up trying."

"What about the new play?" she asked presently. "I hear the most glowing accounts of it, and a few days ago I read a long piece about it in the Paris correspondence of the *Times*. I kept the paper to send to you."

"Thank you," said Claud; "I have seen the paper; and you will soon be able to see the play, if you wish it; for we shall be in Paris within forty-eight hours."

"We?"

"Yes; you and I. We shall start the day after to-morrow."

"My dear Claud, what are you thinking of? I could not possibly be ready in time."

"I am sorry for it; because, in that case, you will have to do the impossible."

"I don't understand you," she said coldly. "I can be ready in a week, if that will do; or, if you cannot wait so long, I can follow you. As for my starting the day after to-morrow, it is out of the question. I have to go up to London to fit on a dress; and besides, I have several engagements here."

"Then you must break your engagements and have your dress sent after you," returned Claud curtly. "I am going back to Paris the day after to-morrow, and I do not choose to leave you here any longer alone. I don't know whether you wish me to speak more plainly."

"Really I think you had better," she said. "You are taking up a very extraordinary tone."

"I suppose you understand what I mean," rejoined Claud, slowly and unwillingly. "Why do you force me into mentioning such things? Since I have been back, I have heard from more than one quarter that you have been making yourself talked about. And I am determined to put a stop to it."

That was all that came of the famous invective which he had been going to hurl at the head of the culprit. Mr. Flemyng's volubility had for once served a good purpose; and Claud being no longer angry, was more alive to the humiliation of his position than to his wrongs.

Nina was not a whit disconcerted. "I must say they have lost no time," she observed. "Did Miss Pennefather stop you on the Esplanade, and feel it her duty to etcetera, etcetera? Or have you received a shoal of anonymous letters?"

"Neither the one nor the other," answered Claud, shortly. "It was Mrs. Knowles who told me, what appears to be no secret, about you—and another person."

"Oh, we needn't leave the other person's name blank, as though he were the devil. Poor little Freddy!"

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Claud, "I think you might keep your pity for those who deserve it more."

"For you, do you mean? I'm sure I don't grudge it you. I should pity anybody who allowed himself to be disturbed by the gossip of spiteful old women, like Mrs. Knowles."

This was more than Claud could listen to with patience. "I don't listen to spiteful gossip," he cried. "Mrs. Knowles would have said nothing, if my father had not begged her to do so; and I suppose that his only reason for not telling me himself was that he wanted to avoid the appearance of triumphing over me—which he would have had every right to do. Spiteful gossip! why it is the talk of the whole place! As I was walking up here, I was actually stopped by a common fisherman—"

"Mr. Thomas Burvill, I presume."

"It was Tom Burvill, if that makes any difference."

"A notorious drunkard and poacher, who, as you know very well, has a grudge against us—for no other reason, that I am aware of, than that he destroyed some property of ours and that we didn t prosecute him for it. Well; what news had this trustworthy creature to give you?"

"Nothing but what he could vouch for upon the evidence of his own senses. He told me he had seen you and Croft—kissing each other."

It was Claud, not Nina, who blushed at the mention of this alleged indiscretion.

She laughed scornfully. "And you believe that?"

"I should be very glad to think that it was a lie," answered Claud, looking down.

"It is a lie. A willful lie, I should think; but if you want to make excuses for your friend, you can put it that he mistook another couple for us. You don't believe me, I see."

Claud hesitated. Ought he, after all, to take a drunken fisherman's word against his wife's? And yet in his heart he suspected that the drunken fisherman was the more to be depended upon of the two.

"Why should I believe you?" he asked at length coldly. "You have deceived me."

"Have I? That remains to be proved. Perhaps, if you had asked me a direct question, I should have given you an honest answer. Claud, I think you used to know me well enough to know at least one thing—whatever I may be, I am not a liar."

"Do you mean me to understand that you have done nothing to be ashamed of?"

"Ah, that is asking too much. I might say Yes, or I might say No—I really can't quite tell. You should put questions that one can reply to. If you had asked me whether I had ever kissed Freddy Croft, for instance, I could have answered No. If you had asked me whether he had ever kissed me, I should have said Yes. He did kiss me once—and only once."

"Oh, you admit once."

"I do. And as this occurred last autumn, and as I have seen him almost every day of his life since, and he has never attempted to repeat the offense, I think you will admit that I cannot have given him much encouragement. Perhaps you think I ought to have written and told you about it by the first post."

"I think, at all events, that your seeing him, as you say, every day of his life since is rather strange."

Then there was an interval of silence, during which Claud several times opened his lips to speak, and as often checked himself. He began, at last, constrainedly and haltingly—

"I hardly know what to say to you—to speak plainly, I hardly know how far to believe you. I think I should be a fool to believe you. And yet I am not sure that it is not best in some cases to be a fool—or at least to appear like one. It is so much the least troublesome plan to hold one's tongue, and shut one's eyes, and drift. Still, having begun, we ought perhaps to go on—to come to some clearer understanding. I don't know whether I make myself intelligible."

"Perfectly intelligible," answered Nina, composedly. "You mean that you are an honest man in a fog; isn't that it?"

She looked him full in the face as she spoke, and her manner had a certain commiserating condescension. It was the very sublimity of impudence, if it was assumed; but I am inclined to think that it was not, and that she really felt herself in some sense superior to him for the moment.

"You mean," she went on, "that we are in a false position, and that you would like to get out of it, if that were in any way possible. But, do you know, I can scarcely see how we are to get out of it—unless it were by the help of Sir James Hannen; and I'm afraid the case is not one for his interference."

Claud made a slight movement of irritation. "You speak as though you were not in the least to blame."

"Do I? I didn't mean to do so. I dare say I am to blame. I am heartless, good-for-nothing—what you please. But I warned you: you can't say I didn't warn you."

"Warned me of what—that you proposed to disgrace me?"

"Don't let us use ugly words—what is the good? Listen, Claud," she continued, raising herself from her recumbent attitude, and speaking with a shade more earnestness. "I will speak as openly as I can; I will conceal nothing from you; and if at the end we are as much in the dark as ever, it shall be no fault of mine. Do you remember, one day before we were married, my telling you I would never consent to a long engagement?"

Claud nodded.

"And I told you why. I tried to make you understand what I was, so that you should not marry me with your eyes shut; and always, from the very first, I had tried to make you understand, only you would not or could not. And you don't understand now; and I don't think you ever will, because you are so different from me. You are one of those people who never intentionally do the things that they ought not to have done, or leave undone the things they ought to have done; and you have a will, or a conscience, or something that enables you to resist temptation, and all that. Now, I am the exact opposite. I suppose I haven't got a will or a conscience. When I do wrong, I am perfectly well aware of it, and I go on doing it all the same. I never make good resolutions now, because I know beforehand that I shall infallibly break them. You might as well try to keep a fly out of a jar of honey as to keep me from yielding to temptation. All I can do is to warn people of what I am; and if they won't be warned, isn't it their own fault? I am what I am; I didn't create myself."

"That is an easy way of evading responsibility for one's actions," Claud could not help observing.

She shrugged her shoulders. "I told you you would not

understand. When I told you that if I were left to myself, I should be sure to flirt with somebody, I was not thinking of evading responsibility; I simply meant to put you on your guard—nothing more."

"According to that, I might tell a man that, if he irritated me, I should very likely murder him, and then, if I did murder him, it would be his own fault."

"Well, I think he would be a great idiot to irritate you after such a frank caution."

She was silent for a moment or two, as if she expected him to speak; but, as he said nothing, she resumed presently—

"I suppose it has never occurred to you that I might retaliate upon you, if I chose, or that there could possibly be anything to be said on my side of the question."

Claud sighed. "Mrs. Knowles told me that I ought not to have sent you over to England alone," he said; "but I can hardly think that you would urge that argument against me."

"Oh no. I came over to England of my own free will, of course, and remained here of my own free will. It is not that."

"What then?"

"Only that if you had cared for me a little more, it would have made a difference. You did care for me once; but it didn't last long; and I warned you of that too. I don't blame you. I should be the last person in the world to do that; for I know you can't help yourself; but there is the fact—you don't love me any more."

Claud winced; for her shot had hit its mark. He would have given the world to be able to answer that he loved her still, but he could not. For a moment he realized, as everybody does now and then, the impotence of poor humanity, and saw clearly the relentless law of change which no mortal can fight against, and felt the miserable self-contempt of a proud man who would fain be true and cannot be true. And then, as was but natural, he tried to convince himself that if change had come, it was not by his fault, and that the evil might yet be remedied. So he harked back to an old grievance.

"Why did you go away and leave me?" he asked reproachfully.

"Why? Don't you think it may have been for that very reason?"

Honestly, he did not think so. He could not accuse himself of any diminution in his love for Nina up to the time when she had left him. Nevertheless, he felt very near to forgiving his wife. But he remembered all that she had done and how he

was not the only one who would suffer through her selfishness, and he said to himself, "Not yet."

Then came another long silence, which Claud was the first to break. He drew a little nearer to Nina, and stood in the same attitude, resting his elbow upon the mantel-piece, and looking down upon her as she sat bending over the fire.

"Nina," he said gently, "I believe you are sorry for having caused all this trouble. I don't think you would have done it, if you had thought."

Her reply was hardly what he had expected.

"I don't think I am sorry," she said consideringly. "What does it matter? I am sorry that there should be such a fuss and bother; but, beyond that, I can't say that I care much."

Claud jerked himself away from the mantel-piece, and thrust his hands into his pockets, tapping with his foot and frowning in impatient incredulity.

"I can't for the life of me see what is your object in talking like that," he ejaculated. "Nobody could possibly be as heartless and selfish as you affect to be."

Nina lifted up a smiling and wondering face. "It isn't affectation," she said quietly; "it's perfectly genuine. What have I done that you should expect me to repent in sackcloth and ashes? I haven't committed any crime that I know of. I have amused myself after my fashion, and I suppose I always shall to the end of the chapter. If you will be advised by me, you will let me alone. I am not in the least likely to 'disgrace' you, as you call it, and I shall not interfere with your amusements. I haven't asked you how you have been spending your time in Paris, have I? Some wives," she added, with a laugh, "would have been in a great state of mind at the thought that their husbands were at the theater every day, talking to pretty actresses."

"Ah, I see it is hopeless," said Claud.

He walked away to the window, and looked out at the fading landscape, his heart full of angry despair. "The governor was right," he thought to himself, with a bitter little laugh; "matrimony is a deplorable institution."

"What are you laughing at?" asked Nina from the other end of the room.

"I am laughing," he answered, "at the results of a runaway marriage. It's a capital joke, isn't it? I am not sure but that you have the best of the laugh though."

He returned slowly, and stood beside her again. "We have not a very cheerful prospect before us; but we must make the best of it. I have only one thing more to say: I must insist upon your going back to Paris with me the day after to-morrow."

"That I certainly shall not do," replied Nina placidly.

"Very well. Then I shall make you do it."

Claud's voice, as he uttered this threat, was not very pleasant to hear; but she was in no way moved by it.

"Oh, but that's impossible, you know," she said. "What can you do? Will you bring a fly to the door, and drag me into it by the scruff of my neck?"

"I hope you will not make it necessary for me to use force; but come you shall. You leave me no resource but to speak to your father."

"Poor old fellow! Much good that will do you! Do you think he can coerce me, if you can't? Really, Claud, you had better give in; this dispute is getting horribly vulgar."

He could not but feel that it was; and, moreover, that it was fast tending towards an anti-climax. To own himself defeated would be to abrogate his authority at once and forever; and yet he was well aware that, if pushed to extremities, he could not and would not carry out his menace of resorting to violence. Out of this dilemma one final chance of escape suggested itself to him. "Nina," he said, "I won't talk to you about your sense of duty or your self-respect: you have shown me that it would be a mere waste of breath to do that. But I will appeal to what I believe you do possess—good-nature. You always used to claim for yourself that you were good-natured."

"My friends are pleased to consider me so."

"Well then, I will ask you to come away from this place out of good-nature, since you won't allow me to put my request upon any higher grounds. If you at all realize what you are doing, you cannot be so selfish as to refuse. Just consider!—a week's gratification of your vanity, or caprice, or whatever you like to call it, against a lifetime of misery for others. In spite of all, I don't think so badly of you yet as to believe that you could hesitate, if you would only think of it."

"A lifetime of misery! Do you imagine that Freddy Croft is the sort of man to make himself miserable for a lifetime?"

"I am not speaking of Freddy Croft; I am speaking of Geneviève."

"Oh, she won't hurt; she'll get over it," returned Nina, rather brutally.

And when she spoke those words, it seemed to Claud that he saw the woman for the first time as she was. All that she had said before was as nothing, compared with this insolent cynicism, this utter disregard of the happiness which she had destroyed; and he felt that a gulf had now opened between him and his wife, across which they would never be able to join hands again. Nevertheless he answered her calmly enough.

"You think this will not hurt her; that is natural. You judge of her by what you are yourself. But she is not like you—thank God!"

"To whomsoever the thanks may be due, she certainly is not like me. She is no more like me than you are, or than she is like Freddy Croft. It is a thousand pities that she should be your sister. If she had not been, you might have married her, and I might have married Freddy; and then everybody would have been suited. Really, if I am the means of breaking off her engagement, I shall feel that I have performed a most benevolent action, and saved her from what you would call a lifetime of misery. It's an ungrateful world; but perhaps she may live to thank me."

"She will live to curse you, as I do!" retorted Claud fiercely.

Nina got up at once. "If you are going to forget yourself in that way I had better leave you," she said.

He sprang to the door, and put his back against it. "You will leave this room when I let you out, and not a minute sooner."

Nina looked at him; and then, all of a sudden, she became frightened. She fell back, throwing up her arms instinctively, and gasping out, "Claud! Claud!—"

He saw in her face the reflection of his own, and throwing open the door, rushed from the room and out of the house, flying from he knew not what.

In the cool air and the twilight his senses soon returned to him; but he did not think of going back to the library. He wandered across the wet lawn, to the cedar-tree under which he had spent so many happy hours, and leaning against the trunk, mused over all that had come and gone in such a brief space of time. He could fancy he saw Nina again, as he had often seen her in those summer days that would never return, moving, with the lithe grace that was all her own, from sunlight to shade under the branches of the old tree there—herself an embodiment of sunlight. It was the same Nina whom he had left just now in the library, staring at him with dilated eyes of terror—the same deceitfully candid, designedly reckless, good-naturedly selfish creature with whom he had fallen in love. But what had happened to him, or to her, that the very peculiarities which had so fascinated him a year and a half before should now move him with nothing but aversion? To such questions the answer is wanting; and so Claud confessed to himself, with an impatient sigh. All that was clear was that somewhere a fatal mistake had been made.

A cold mist was creeping up the valley with the darkness, as

he walked slowly away, his head bent, and his hands clasped behind his back; the heavy air was still and silent, except for the small sound of drops of moisture falling among the evergreens; the cheerlessness of the prospect made a fit accompaniment to his melancholy reflections. "I shall have to make over my allowance to her, and live in Paris upon what I can earn," he was thinking. "I shall never be able to live with her. Poor old governor! he wasn't far wrong. Hang all women!—little shall they see of me for the rest of my days. And the worst of it is that she has beaten me—beaten me all along the line; though Heaven knows I had the strongest positions. It wasn't a fair fight. What is one to do with a woman if she drives you to a point where words won't help you any more? Ah! if she had been a man—" And he clenched his fist involuntarily.

Now at that moment, as chance would have it, a figure suddenly loomed up out of the fog on the further side of the moat; and presently some one crossed the drawbridge with quick, brisk steps, whistling, appropriately enough, "We don't want to fight;" the ditty with which, at that time, the ears of the British public were chiefly afflicted. There was no mistaking the identity of that joyous pedestrian. Claud's heart gave a bound; for had he not here the answer to his wish? He remained motionless until the other had set foot upon the gravel, and then took two strides forward, and confronted him. Freddy started violently, and fell back a step or two, the exclamation that was upon his lips dying away when he saw Claud's face. Claud came closer to him, drawing his left fist slowly back to his shoulder. Here, at any rate, a good substitute for words was available.

But the blow was never delivered. No one has ever accused Freddy Croft of lacking pluck; but we know the influence of a guilty conscience upon the courage, and very likely the suddenness of this encounter may have robbed him of his presence of mind. At all events, he made another hasty movement of retreat, and, missing his footing, fell heavily backwards into the moat.

Claud burst out laughing. "You have saved me the trouble of knocking you down," he called out; "but I advise you to keep out of my way for the next two days, if you value your personal appearance."

And, without waiting for a reply, he crossed the bridge, and strode away, feeling a trifle relieved.

Only when he was half way down the avenue did he remember the depth of the moat, and that it was just on the cards that his late antagonist might be badly hurt. He stopped and

listened: there was not a sound to be heard. Then, rather unwillingly, he retraced his steps, thinking, "After all, the fellow may have broken his neck;" and, advancing to the brink of the moat, called out, "Hi! Croft, are you down there?"

A faint moan was the only reply.

Claud scrambled down the bank, and groping about in the darkness, found Freddy lying just as he had fallen.

"What's the matter, Croft? What have you done to yourself?" he asked, in some anxiety.

"I've broke my back, I think," answered Freddy feebly.

"Nonsense, man! get up!" returned Claud, not choosing to acknowledge his alarm even to himself.

"I can't," said Freddy, "I haven't any feeling in my legs. Just run round to the stables, like a good fellow, and tell them to bring a hurdle or something. I—"

The speaker's voice ended in a long sigh, and his head fell back.

"Good God! he's dead!" ejaculated Claud.

As the faculties of a drowning man are said to gain a supernatural grasp, and to embrace in one comprehensive flash of memory the history of a whole life, so at that moment Claud realized in all its force the awful ruin that had fallen upon him. He saw Geneviève's maiden widowhood; he saw Lady Croft's despair; he saw Croft Manor passing into the hands of the far-away next of kin; he saw himself branded forever as a murderer, if not in the eyes of the law, at least in those of the world; and knowing what a far wider sorrow this man's death would cause than his own could have done, he longed, with a longing as intense as it was vain, that he could only change places with him. And all this while he was tearing open Freddy's waistcoat and shirt, and thrusting his hand over the heart which was still feebly beating.

The events of the next few hours were like incidents in a horrible nightmare, which Claud cannot bear to look back upon now; yet will never be able to forget. He remembers hurrying back to the house, and that presently he was in the moat again, with a little crowd of servants and stable-helpers; and they had brought a shutter and lanterns; and Nina was there too, pale and horror-struck, and Mr. Flemyng, speechless for once. He remembers helping to carry the poor fellow indoors, and that, as soon as they had restored him to consciousness, something was said about getting him into bed; but Freddy begged so hard to be taken home that it was finally thought best not to agitate him by opposing his wish; and a wagonette was got ready, with a mattress, on to which he was lifted. One of the men was going to saddle a horse and ride off for the doc-

tor; but Claud, with that feverish craving to be doing something which besets most people at such times, intercepted him.

"I can run there in less time than it would take you to get a horse ready and ride," he said; and before the man could answer him, he was off.

Claud was a swift runner, and knowing, as he did, the exact position of the doctor's house, he made straight across country for his point; and, considering that no groom was ever yet known to saddle a horse in a hurry, he did perhaps really accomplish the distance more quickly than a horseman would have done. He dashed on through the darkness, swerving at no obstacle, scrambling over hedges and ditches, breaking through fences; and reached his destination at last, breathless and exhausted, only to be informed that the doctor had not yet returned from his rounds. The stolid maid-servant who answered his ring, and who was probably too familiar with anxious messengers to be infected by his emotion, could give him no clew as to her master's whereabouts. He might be back at any moment, she said; but then again, he might not return before dinner-time. "Mostly in general, he had his dinner at seven o'clock; but sometimes it was kep' warm for him up to half-past eight. 'Tis just as may be, you see, sir," said the exasperating woman.

The end of it was that Claud paced up and down the garden in an agony of impatience for more than an hour before the lamps of the doctor's dog-cart were seen approaching.

The doctor was an excellent little man in a large practice—a trifle rough of manner; but kind-hearted and absolutely indifferent to his own comfort in the matter of food and sleep. As soon as he had been told what had happened, he turned his tired horse. "Jump up," he said to Claud shortly; and in a few minutes they were bowling along the high-road towards Croft at a good round pace.

Not much was said on the way. One of the pair was too agitated to be capable of thought or speech upon any but a single subject; and the other, who was a man of few words, had probably perceived that he could get no information worth having out of his companion. Claud remembers that, after a time, he was sitting in the hall at Croft, waiting, like a prisoner, to receive his sentence; but how long he sat there he has no idea. There was a subdued stir and commotion going on, doors opening and shutting overhead, servants hurrying up and down stairs, exchanging strident whispers, as the habit of their class is, when an accident has occurred. Apparently, too, the house was full of visitors—people in evening dress, who crossed and recrossed the hall, or collected in groups,

talking together in low voices and looking oddly at Claud, but never addressing him.

At length the doctor came down, and made hastily for the door. Claud started up and followed him, and as soon as they were outside—

"Well?" he asked eagerly.

The doctor had already gathered up his reins, and had one foot on the step. "I am going to send off a telegram to London," he said. "It will be a comfort to them to have the best advice."

"Can his life be saved?"

"Impossible to say: we must hope for the best. But he will never walk again."

Claud hardly took in the meaning of this announcement. His whole mind was filled with one dread—a selfish one, if you like.

"But will he live?" he persisted.

"We must hope for the best," answered the doctor again; and drove away without another word.

Claud staggered aimlessly out into the night. He felt that Freddy's doom and his own had been pronounced.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

"DEVILISH hard luck for a man, I must say, to meet with his death in that stoopid way—devilish hard! Why, over and over again, when I was afloat, I've seen a man fall clear from the top-gallant rigging, and come down on the deck—slap!—like a sack of potatoes, and be none the worse for it a month afterwards. Smashed a rib or two perhaps—something of that kind. Upon my life, I sometimes think the men of the present day ain't made of the same stuff as we were. The idea of tumbling into a bit of a ditch like that, and getting your back broke!"

"Not broken, Admiral, not broken. It is a case of severe injury to the vertebral column, I believe."

"God bless my soul! sir," cries the Admiral testily, "what the deuce does it matter whether it's a broken back or a severe what-d'ye-call it, so long as the poor beggar has got to die of it?"

"Not very much certainly. But I am told that cases of that description do not by any means invariably or necessarily end fatally."

"Don't they indeed? For all that, young Croft won't last out the week, I hear. But perhaps you can give us a better report, Pender: it seems you know all about it."

"I only repeat what Dr. Soames told me," answers Mr. Pender meekly; "and I suppose you will allow that he is entitled to speak with some authority upon surgical matters."

"Don't know, I'm sure," growls the Admiral, who does not love to be corrected. "Never had him in my house, I'm thankful to say. If he don't treat his patients better than he plays whist, I'm sorry for 'em, that's all!"

"Well, well; he knows something about anatomy, I presume; and from what he tells me, there is nothing unusual in this case. He says you can't account for these things. One often hears of marvelous escapes, and in the same way it sometimes happens that a comparatively slight accident has fatal results. Soames says any one of us might have just as bad a fall tomorrow, getting down from the box of a carriage. So it is!—in the midst of life we are in death. It is a most unfortunate business—most unfortunate in *every* way," concludes Mr. Pender, sighing heavily.

The little semicircle in the club window contracts itself; gray heads approach one another, and are wagged solemnly; looks full of profound meaning are interchanged.

"I'm sorry for Flemyng; I will say that. He's a man whom I don't like; but I'm sorry for him," calls out the Admiral magnanimously.

General Blair is understood to second the motion.

"Ah, yes, indeed!" chimes in the lugubrious voice of Mr. Pender. "When such affliction comes into a man's home, one would be very unwilling to appear hard upon him; but I must confess— However, least said, soonest mended."

"Some men would sell their souls to have a baronet popping in and out of their house at all hours," the Admiral is constrained to observe, after a manful effort to keep silence.

Whereupon Mr. Pender shuts his mouth with a virtuous and inflexible air, and looks out to sea. Presently he remarks that the glass is falling, and that he shouldn't wonder if there was snow about.

"Did anybody see the accident happen?" inquires one of the group, who is not so well up in matters of local interest as some of our friends.

"Oh, dear me, yes," answers Mr. Pender, in a low, sad voice. "That is the worst of it. It was young Gervis who came in, and told them what had happened. I am afraid there can be no doubt that there was a scuffle. I don't think there has been any attempt made to disguise that."

"Oh, young Gervis! Didn't I hear some talk about an affair between his wife and poor Croft?" asks the ill-informed one.

"God bless my soul, man! why, it has been the scandal of the county for the last three months!" cries the Admiral. "There's no hushing up a thing like that."

"I fear not—I fear not," Mr. Pender agrees. And he adds, with manifest reluctance, "There is nothing I dislike so much as talking about matters which do not concern me; but I fancy that, before very long, you will hear some things that will surprise you."

"What things? What d'ye mean?" asks the Admiral greedily.

But a profound sigh is Mr. Pender's sole response.

"They'll have an inquest, of course," pipes out General Blair.

"Oh, I hope not, General. I hope that may be avoided."

"Eh?—avoid it? Can't avoid it. Can't do without an inquest. Must have an inquest," says the General, in a tone of cheery anticipation.

"I think that you will find that that is a point left to the discretion of the coroner," answers Mr. Pender, who, by the way, somewhat resembles the typical coroner himself in appearance, and is evidently well acquainted with the duties of that functionary. "You see," he continues judicially, "this cannot be considered exactly a case of sudden death. I should hardly think—I won't speak too positively—but I should *hardly* think that an inquiry would be called for in the present instance. Of course, if death had resulted immediately, the case would have been different."

"What!" roars the Admiral, "do you mean to tell me that, if I fall down-stairs and break my neck, I am liable to have a dashed coroner prying into my house, and intruding upon my wife and family, and pulling my corpse about?" The Admiral turns quite purple at the bare notion of this imaginary profanation. "I should like to catch him at it! He'd go out a deuced deal quicker than he came in, I can tell him!" shouts the indignant officer.

"Well, you know, Admiral, you would hardly be in a position to offer resistance under such circumstances," observes Mr. Pender, with a grim chuckle.

"They say that poor girl is terribly cut up," the Admiral remarks after a pause.

"Miss Gervis, do you mean? Ah, yes; and well she may be!—well she may be!" says Mr. Pender. "I have always thought she was the best of the family; but I am afraid those Gervises are a bad lot."

"A deuced unlucky lot, it seems to me," observes the Admiral more charitably.

"That may be; but it is a question whether a man has a right to call the natural consequences of his actions unlucky. The moment I heard that the young people had been sent over from France post-haste, I said to Mrs. Pender, 'You may be sure the whole truth has come out at last.' No, Admiral, I would rather not say any more, if you'll excuse me. You will hear all about it in good time, I have no doubt."

"A man who makes mysteries—" the Admiral begins in his most emphatic tones. But the remainder of his speech cannot be recorded; for at this juncture, the reporter of the above remarks, who had arrived in Beachborough the night before, laid down the newspaper which he had not been reading and left the room.

They did not mean to be ill-natured, those talkative veterans. A catastrophe was in some sort a godsend to them, as varying the monotony of their purposeless lives, and it was hardly to be expected that they should refrain from discussing and secretly enjoying this one a little. As the news of a birth or a marriage stirs the sympathies of all women, so that of a death would appear to have a special attractiveness for old men. And indeed the subject is one in which they may well be excused for feeling something of a personal interest. Yet a little while and the Admiral and Mr. Pender will be pronouncing their funeral oration over General Blair; and again a little while, and the melancholy Pender—we will say—will be left to deplore the consequence of his poor friend Bagshawe's imprudent indulgence in port wine. Nay, there is every reason to suppose that, sooner or later, the humble writer and the benevolent reader of these pages will be spoken of in the past tense at their respective clubs, and their several virtues and failings, their debts or their legacies, descanted upon in no broken-hearted accents. Those Beachborough cronies would have been very much surprised if they had been accused of heartlessness. Had they not openly declared their sorrow at the occurrences under consideration? Had they even committed themselves to a positive assertion that the various reports flying about were true? They did but repeat what they had been told; and their opinion of Freddy's hopeless state was, unhappily, only that of the posse of doctors and surgeons who had flocked together from Lynchester, Beachborough, and the whole country-side to meet round his bed. A great man was summoned from London, and, after spending some hours at Croft, returned, taking with him a check proportionate to his greatness; but he could say little to con-

sole the distracted lady who entreated and almost commanded him to save her son. He was a shade less despondent—or less plain-spoken—than his provincial brethren; apprehended no immediate danger; and had even known of a few cases in which the use of the limbs had been recovered, after a similar accident. He did not, however, profess to have discovered any hopeful symptoms in the condition of his present patient; and upon the subject of treatment and remedies he was ominously silent.

Freddy himself had been convinced from the first that he was beyond help of these. He bore his sufferings, which were very severe at times, like a man; only once or twice expressing a hope that they would not last long. The poor fellow did not want to live; nor in truth could life be greatly desired for him. Some cripples there are for whom existence has yet its pleasures; but no one could suppose that Freddy Croft was likely to prove one of them; and indeed all those about him could not but echo the wish that his time might be short.

All, that is to say, with one notable exception. On the second day after the catastrophe, Freddy called his mother, and begged her to go over to Southlands, and bring back Geneviève with her.

"I have behaved like a scoundrel to her," he said; "but I don't think she'll refuse to come and say good-by to me."

So Lady Croft went; and, it is needless to say, met with no hindrance in the execution of her task. In the carriage she endeavored, through her tears and sobs, to prepare Geneviève in some measure for the revelation which she knew that her son would make; but the girl, who was quite composed interrupted her.

"Claud has told me all about it," she said. "We need not speak of it now."

The poor lady began to stammer out some incoherent pleas in extenuation, blaming "the woman," blaming Mr. Gervis, blaming everybody except the unhappy culprit, who would so soon be beyond the reach of either blame or pardon.

"Dear Lady Croft," said Geneviève gently, "do not make excuses for him; they are not needed. He was never really engaged to me, you know; and even though he had been, it would have made no difference. I should not have cared for him at all if I could not forgive him anything and everything."

"It is in the blood, my dear; they are all the same, and always have been; they cannot help themselves. If you knew how good he has been all this year, and how he has changed his habits!—and all for your sake. But now there is an end of everything."

"No, there is not," answered the girl firmly. "He will not die; he will recover, and walk again as well as ever. I have felt certain of it from the very beginning."

Lady Croft shook her head, and buried her face in her handkerchief. But Geneviève repeated her conviction.

"He will get well; I know he will. You will see. And supposing that I am wrong, we shall be none the worse off for having hoped while there was still hope. But I am not wrong. I am as sure that we shall save him as that I am sitting here."

And from this opinion nothing availed to move her, then or afterwards. Her hopefulness did, in the sequel, prove to be some comfort and support to Lady Croft, who was only too willing to grasp at straws; but to others, who knew that this inability to believe the worst is no uncommon phenomenon, it was very distressing.

What pleased Geneviève was the tacit acknowledgment on the part of the whole household at Croft of her right to be there. Lady Croft had begged her to stay for a week—or longer; and, perfectly understanding what was implied in that indefinite limit, she could hardly have refused, even had she wished to do so. But at the same time it had been clear to her that her position in the house would be an equivocal, and might easily be made a very uncomfortable one; and therefore it was a relief to her mind to be received and treated in all respects as one of the family. Lady Croft took her, with as little delay as possible, to the room where Freddy was lying; and his sister, who had been sitting by the bedside, got up at once, and left the two together.

The meeting could not be otherwise than a painful one; and there was much to make it so besides the conviction which one of them at least felt that it was very nearly their last meeting on earth; but Geneviève had thought of all that, and had made up her mind as to the course she should adopt. It must have cost her an effort to sit down in the chair just vacated by Miss Croft, and to talk cheerfully of the day when they had parted in the Bois, as though all the subsequent sorrows that had fallen upon them could be ignored; but she did it; and if her treatment of the situation astonished Freddy a good deal, it undoubtedly had the desired effect of calming him, and reducing the state of feverish excitement in which he had been all day. When he began, in a weak, trembling voice, to make his confession, she stopped him with an uplifted hand.

"That is all over and done with," she said, "and you must never trouble yourself with thinking of it again. It does not trouble me, because I know you love me best—"

"I was sure you would!" he cried eagerly, his hot hand grasping hers. "I have been an awful fool, and worse than a fool—nothing is too bad for me; but I never for one moment was untrue to you in my heart. I have been utterly miserable ever since the beginning of it; and I never thought—I never intended—I hoped, you know, I should be able to break with it all; only, I couldn't somehow—and old Knowles told me—and I was very unhappy about it; but—"

"I know," she answered, smiling at him. "I can quite understand. Don't you remember that evening of the ball at Southlands, and my telling you that nothing would make any difference in me, not even your loving some one else, if that were to come? So you see, a thing of this kind, which was not your fault at all, is not worth our remembering, and we won't remember it. A great deal too much has been made of it already."

"How generous you are!" he cried, with moist eyes. "There is no one like you in the world."

"It is not generous to understand the truth," she said. "But if there were occasion for it, I could be generous—to you."

And I dare say she was thinking of some one else, to whom it would not be quite so easy to show generosity, and whose trespasses she could hardly yet say to herself that she had forgiven.

"There is no one like you," he repeated. "I wonder what could ever have made you care for such a fellow as I am!" And then, after a brief silence, "I suppose you didn't bring the violin with you?"

"Yes, I did. Your mother was a little shocked, I think, when she saw them put it into the carriage; but she said nothing, nor did I, because I knew she would not understand. But I remembered that you used to like to hear me play."

"You think of everything!" he exclaimed gratefully. "Poor old mother! she sits here, with her Bible on her knee, and a face as long as your arm, and I can't say a word to comfort her. There's no use in pulling a long face, is there? She thinks it awful of a man on his death-bed to go on as I do; but if it ain't wrong to laugh in the beginning of your life, I can't see why it should be wrong to laugh at the end of it. Yesterday I horrified her by getting Florry to read out a bit of *Soapy Spunge* to me. Do you recollect where old Soapy Spunge says he'll make 'em cry 'capivvy!'? That always used to make me roar. 'Capivvy,' don't you know, instead of *peccavi*—ha, ha, ha!"

It was the ghost of poor Freddy's jolly laugh; but Geneviève forced herself to join in it. She had never heard of the work

to which he alluded, and would not, perhaps, under any circumstances have relished the quotations which he continued to give from it to the full extent that he did; but she encouraged him, and laughed with him, reminding him of old jokes and old days; so that, in less than an hour, he felt and spoke more like himself than he had done for months.

"It's no use pulling a long face, is it?" he said again. But as the words passed his lips a sudden spasm contracted his own.

"Are you in pain, dear?" asked Geneviève, bending over him.

"No—not much, at least—that's nothing. But—but it's so hard to leave you, Gen."

"You are not going to leave me," she whispered. "You are going to stay with me for years and years, I hope."

He shook his head. "It's all up with me; the doctors as good as told me so. I don't complain. I had a jolly life while it lasted, and we must all die some day. It's only—"

"Yes, I know. And you must remember me. You must try to live for my sake."

"Ah, if trying would do any good!—"

He did not tell her that he felt his strength decreasing, slowly but surely, with every hour. True to his life-long maxim of making the best of things, he was anxious to maintain a cheerful demeanor as long as he should be able to manage it. He affected even to be partly convinced by her sanguine prognostications; and possibly also the thought of saying farewell may have made him distrust his courage a little.

After some time, Geneviève said, "Freddy, I have a favor to ask of you."

"Then you know beforehand that it is granted."

"It is about Claud. He is so dreadfully unhappy. I don't think he has slept at all, and he has hardly eaten anything since—since that evening. He says he can never forgive himself; but I want you to see him, and say you forgive him."

"Forgive him? Poor, dear old boy!—what for? He hadn't anything to do with this."

"He thinks he had."

"Rubbish! I started back when I saw him, and I forgot about the moat, and down I went. That was how it happened. It was no more his fault than it would have been if my horse had shied at him and pitched me off. And if it came to forgiving, you know— But we won't talk about that. Where is he? Is he here?"

"I don't know; but I think very likely he is not far off He hangs about all day long, asking for news of you when

he can get a chance; but he does not like to come into the house."

"I never heard of such a thing! I must have him up at once. Would you mind ringing the bell, and sending somebody to look for him?"

But Geneviève said she would rather go herself. She slipped down-stairs and out of the house, unnoticed: and presently, sure enough, she came upon her brother, wandering dejectedly about the deserted cricket-ground.

"Come in; he wants you," she said, touching him upon the shoulder; and he turned, and followed her, without replying.

He was in truth inconsolable; and Geneviève had made a mistake in supposing that the assurance of Freddy's pardon could go to the root of his grief. Of that he had felt tolerably secure in advance; for remorse had not so blinded him but that he could perceive that no reasonable man would dream of holding him responsible for what had happened; but the fact remained that he would have to bear the burden and consequences of guilt, and that through him more than one life must be rendered desolate.

"If you mean that a jury would not find me guilty of manslaughter, I agree with you," he said afterwards in Freddy's room, where Geneviève had judiciously abstained from entering with him; "but that is cold comfort." And again: "Put it in what way you will, it all comes round to this—I did it. Suppose your gun had gone off out shooting, and killed me; would you not have reproached yourself, even though it had been the purest accident? And what I did was not pure accident."

He knew that, for the sake of the poor fellow who was lying helpless there, he ought to make some effort to disguise his own misery; but the task was too hard a one for him. He was exhausted by want of sleep, want of food, and the persistent torment of a fixed idea; and it was only with difficulty that he could open his lips at all. Nor was he able to delude himself with a shadow of the hope which buoyed up his sister. He had noticed immediately the pinched, gray look that had come over Freddy's features, and his heart had died within him at the sight. It was a great relief to him when Geneviève looked in at the door, and he could feel free to go away and hide his despair.

But as he got up, Freddy plucked him nervously by the sleeve. "Look here, old fellow; there's one thing I wanted to say to you. I know I've no right to interfere; but it's on my mind. About your wife, I mean. I wanted to tell you that you needn't worry yourself about—about her and me. It was

all nonsense and make-believe. And I say, Claud, old chap, don't be too hard upon her. I saw, plain enough, from the first day, that pique was at the bottom of it all," continued this sagacious observer, with one of those innocently knowing looks which had sometimes made Claud smile in days of yore. "She said you were too good for her, and that you didn't care a bit about her—and that. Gen has forgiven me; don't you think you might forgive her? There! I won't say any more. I thought I'd just mention it, and you won't take it as impertinence, I hope—coming from a dying man, you know."

Claud said he certainly would not take it in that way, and, shaking hands with his friend, bade him good night.

"You'll come again, won't you?" the latter called after him.

"Yes," he answered; "I shall be at hand whenever you want me." And so departed.

Truth to tell, he had hardly given a thought to Nina since he had left her: the great care that weighed upon his mind had swallowed up all lesser ones. But now, as he walked across the park towards the inn where he had left his horse —for he had shrunk from showing himself to the servants at Croft—he remembered that she also must surely be in sore trouble, and what Freddy had said softened him towards her. He took the explanation he had received for what it was worth. Nothing could explain away Nina's conduct, or her own candid admissions; but what was the good of quarreling in a world where half the wrong that is done is done unwittingly, and where the guilty and the innocent are confused in a jumble of rewards and punishments to which no man can hope to find the clew? What had made him so furious lately seemed but a small matter now; and pardon was, after all, an easy boon to grant—if that were likely to be of any use.

While his mind was thus feebly groping among the outworks of a melancholy wisdom, his body had been obediently performing its allotted duty, and had brought him to the monstrous and costly iron gates which were set up in the time of the late Sir Montagu Croft. He passed through these, and turning on the high-road, found himself suddenly face to face with Nina—Nina, advancing with a slow and listless step, her face pale and drawn, and—oh, portent!—her hat unbecomingly pushed back from her forehead. She had driven over from the Moated House, and had left her pony-chaise in the village, as he had left his horse, being actuated, doubtless, by similar motives. If Claud had not been predisposed towards leniency, her bearing must yet have mollified him. Approaching her, he gave her, without preface, the latest news of the sufferer's condition; and presently they turned, and walked away, side

by side, half reconciled already by their common sorrow and remorse.

Claud was ready to hold out the olive-branch, but he was a little puzzled how to begin; and it was Nina who spoke first.

"I suppose," said she, looking down upon the ground, "there is no good in my saying I am sorry."

"There is good, if you mean it," answered Claud quickly.

But to this she made no rejoinder; and how was he to tell whether it was shame or pride that kept her silent? After all, this pardoning process was not quite so easy as it had looked from a distance. To forgive is one thing; but how many men or women are there magnanimous enough to forgive graciously? I fear that Claud was not one of that select few. All he could find to say, after long cogitation—and I am bound to confess that he did not say it in a very pleasant voice—was—

"What is done is done. Let us agree to pass a sponge over the past."

She looked up timidly. "It is so much the best way!"

Without doubt it was the best way; and yet, perhaps, she ought hardly to have said so. However, Claud extended his hand, and she took it; and after that fashion peace was signed. They were both glad to leave the subject.

Now, although matters had thus been smoothed over between the husband and wife, they not only continued to inhabit separate houses—which, under the circumstances, could hardly have been avoided—but manifested no special eagerness to see more of one another. They met, to be sure, every day, at the same place, outside the gates of Croft Manor; but their meetings were not prearranged, and during those interviews, which seldom lasted long, they spoke exclusively of Freddy's health. Nina never went beyond the lodge; but Claud was in the sick-room for an hour or more daily, and gave a curious account of what went on there. "He has had all sorts of people to see him. Old Colonel Finch came down the other day, and is staying in the house now. Sometimes there are three or four men in the room at once, chatting about racing prospects, just as if he would be out again next season; and he seems to enjoy it, poor fellow! But what he likes best of all is to get Gen to play the violin to him. Yesterday he made her give him the instrument, and show him how to play the scale; and he scraped away, lying on his back there, and they laughed like a couple of children. No one would suppose that he was near death; and yet I know he thinks he is himself, and I fancy I can detect a shade of difference in him every day."

One afternoon, Cl[illegible]e of intelligence to communi-

cate, which astonished his wife not a little. "Freddy and Gen are going to be married."

She did not understand him. "I am afraid that will never be," she said.

"It is going to be. The marriage is to take place immediately."

"Where?—in his room, do you mean?"

"Yes. He has taken it very strongly into his head; and I believe Lady Croft wishes it too. Of course, no one can object. They have got a special license; and the ceremony is to be performed the day after to-morrow, unless—it should be necessary to perform it sooner."

Nina did not speak for a few minutes. "Poor things!" she sighed at last; "it is an odd fancy."

"Do you think so? I can understand that he should wish her to bear his name after he is gone: the wish does not seem to me an unnatural one. But I confess that I dread the scene. There are a number of people whom he wants to be present. The governor is coming, and Mr. Knowles, who drove over from Beachborough yesterday to see him. And he wished me," added Claud, in a somewhat altered voice, "to ask you if you would come too."

Nina flushed. "Oh, I would so much rather not!" she exclaimed. "That is, I will be there, of course, if you think he really wishes it, or that it would look unkind to stay away; but it would be dreadful to have to face them all."

"You can do exactly as you like," Claud said, not very cordially.

"Then I won't go. It would be rather—bad taste if I did; don't you think so?"

Claud made no answer.

"I am sure it would," she said.

Nevertheless, when the day came, she changed her mind—having, I should imagine, balanced good taste against a combination of benevolence and feminine curiosity, and found that the former consideration kicked the beam—and it struck me that her presence pleased poor Freddy more than it did her husband.

Mr. Gervis was kind enough to offer me a lift over to Croft in his brougham, and he was so exceedingly cynical and unfeeling in his remarks by the way, that I felt sure he had some genuine emotion to conceal. He began by observing that he should sincerely regret poor young Croft as an individual; but that as a son-in-law he should feel resigned to the loss of him.

"For I need not point out to you," said he, with a sidelong

glance at me, "that he would infallibly have caused us all an immensity of annoyance by and by. In the nature of things, he would have developed one form of vice or another; and, so far as I am able to understand my daughter, she is not the sort of person to take a calm, philosophical view of vice. I look upon this," he went on, "as a truly providential dispensation—or shall we say a real stroke of good luck?—for Geneviève. For several years she will be able to indulge in the luxury of grief; and then, when she marries again, and has to undergo all the abominable plagues which are inseparable from married life, she will always be able to fall back upon the happy memory of having once belonged to a faultless being. It is not to every one that these mercies are vouchsafed."

The old gentleman's face, when he encountered his daughter-in-law in the hall, was a study. I fancy that, if ever he had felt a strong dislike in his life, it was for Mrs. Nina that he had reserved that sentiment; but in the suave courtesy of his greeting, and in the solicitude with which he trusted that her health had not suffered from all these agitations, there was but so faint a spice of irony that I should have been very sorry to swear to its existence. In the whole course of my acquaintance with him, I can only remember once to have heard him say a downright ill-natured thing of anybody; and that was of Lady Croft, who came to the top of the staircase to meet us, sobbing hysterically.

"Who was that woman before she married?" he whispered to me, as we followed her along the corridor. And when I told him—"An old family?" he inquired. I said she had been an heiress, and that I believed her father had made his fortune by the invention of some patent drug.

"Ah! so I should have supposed," he remarked. "That obstreperous grief *sent sa canaille d'une lieue.*"

For my own part, I confess that I was in some danger of falling under the ban of Mr. Gervis's displeasure and forfeiting my title to gentility; and that not so much from the sight of the unfortunate mother's distress as from the enforced cheerfulness of the rest of the party, whom we presently joined. Colonel Finch was rubbing his hands and talking very fast to Miss Croft; Claud was turning over the leaves of a Prayer-book with trembling fingers, pointing out the responses in the service for the solemnization of matrimony to Freddy, and cautioning him in a nervously jocular manner against answering at the wrong time; the bride, pale as a ghost, but with a determined smile upon her lips, was standing beside him. The strain was too great, and I feared lest at any moment it should end in a general break down. We were the last to enter the

room; and the ceremony was immediately proceeded with—which I was thankful for.

It was soon over; for the clergyman mercifully omitted the greater part of that marriage service which is not, according to my humble notions, a very beautiful or impressive rite at the best of times, and which he must have felt as we all did, to be painfully inappropriate to the circumstances of the case. Standing by the bedside in his white surplice, and reading in a low, murmuring voice, he had more the appearance of administering the viaticum than of pronouncing the Church's blessing upon the union of a young couple; and I dare say he was as glad to shut up his book, and get away, as we were to be relieved of his presence.

After the register had been duly signed there came a moment of embarrassment. Custom has provided us with certain useful, meaningless phrases which rise naturally to our lips when the common incidents of life call upon us to congratulate or condole with our fellow-creatures; but it is only persons of quick wits and exceptional presence of mind who can rise to the level of an extraordinary emergency; and I suppose that none of us answered to that description; for we stood looking at one another uncomfortably and not speaking a word. At length Freddy's weak voice made itself heard.

"I should like to say good-by to you fellows before you go. The chances are I shan't have another opportunity."

So each of us in turn bent over him, and shook him by the hand. I believe I said something stupid about "while there's life there's hope," and "see you again soon, old fellow." I ought, of course, to have held my peace, and I had no sooner spoken than I knew it; but ah, dear me! how many times in my life have I had to make the same confession, and to feel the same humiliating disgust with myself? The only comfort is that my utterances cannot be of much importance to anybody, and that probably those who hear them forget them long before I do. Directly after I had said this senseless thing, I looked round apprehensively for Mr. Gervis; but he had already vanished. He confided to me afterwards that he thought these solemn leave-takings were in the worst possible taste; and whether, as he implied, this had been his reason for leaving the room, or whether he had felt some faint distrust of his own powers of self-command, I am unable to say.

The truth is that Freddy's leave-taking was anything but solemn. To some natures it is not given to perceive the sadder and more serious aspects of life, and I know not what should make them view its close with other eyes, unless it be fear—to which our brave little man had always been a stran-

ger. Lady Croft, I am afraid, did not think the scene a very edifying one; but to my mind there was nothing shocking in it; and I can only hope that when my own turn comes, I may be able to meet friend Death with as cheerful and composed a countenance.

Freddy had signed his will at the same time as the register, and it appeared that he had made a few small bequests to some of us who were present.

"I've left you the brown cob, Colonel," he said to old Finch, who was leaning over the rail at the foot of the bed. "You know the one you used to ride to the meets sometimes. Just what you want for the park in the mornings. Give him plenty of exercise, and you'll be all right on him; but don't keep him too long in the stable, or he'll be bucking you over his head in the middle of Rotten Row one of these fine days. Doctor, I've left you a horse too. I don't know whether you remember him—that flea-bitten gray that used to belong to Lynchester. You'll find him a little awkward at starting; but that don't matter in a two-wheeled trap. Keep on turning him round, and he'll make up his mind after a bit; and once he's off, he'll go as quiet as a sheep."

So he went on with the list, his voice growing gradually weaker, and the pauses becoming longer between each sentence. At last he said: "There's only one thing more. I want you all to listen to this. There's been a lot of talk, I hear, about how I came to smash myself up; and some people say one thing and some another; so I may just as well put it right before I go. It was the sort of thing that wouldn't happen once in a hundred times, I suppose; and yet there wasn't anything very extraordinary about it. I was standing talking to Claud there, and it was in the dark, you know; and I took a step back, quite forgetting that I was upon the edge of the moat; and so I fell. So now you know all about it; and that's the whole truth, and—"

"No," interrupted Claud suddenly, in a hollow voice which made us all start; "it is not the whole truth. Why should we disguise what every one suspects? It was I who killed him."

"Hold your tongue, you idiot!" eagerly whispered some one whose zeal for the welfare of mankind has sometimes been miscalled officiousness. For the fact was I remembered what those horrible old men had said about an inquest; and besides, how could any good purpose be served by letting strangers into the secret of bygone family dissensions?

But my intervention came a little late. Claud had said all that he intended to say, and now walked away to the window, and stood there, resting his forehead against the glass.

"He kill me!" cried Freddy, with a feeble laugh; "that's a good joke. What? Claud Gervis—the best friend I have in the world. You don't believe that, I should hope. However, I'll take my oath, if you like, that he never laid a hand upon me." And then, perceiving that Claud had moved out of sight, he raised his finger to his forehead. "Poor old boy!" he whispered; "all this has upset him; he don't know what he's talking about. Now, if you don't mind, I think, I should like to be left to myself for a bit. I'm beginning to feel rather done, and I expect I'd better try and do a turn of sleep."

Just as we were leaving the room, I heard Geneviève call to the doctor, "Will you come here, please? I think he has fainted."

Had he fainted? Colonel Finch, who took my arm to walk down the corridor, explaining that he felt a touch of the gout coming on, was not of that opinion.

"It's all over—all over—what? Poor young fellow! To be taken like that, when such useless old men as you and I are left to encumber the earth—encumber the earth. I'd have given half I possess sooner than this should have happened. I would indeed—what?"

The worthy Colonel had to withdraw his arm from mine in order to blow his nose loudly; and perhaps I was not sorry to have a hand free for the same purpose. Mr. Gervis would have driven me back to Beachborough, but I said I preferred to walk; and in truth I don't think I could have borne his society at that especial moment.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE END.

I HAVE always thought that it was much too bad of Freddy, after harrowing our feelings in the manner just described, to get perfectly strong and well again; and I can never remember my twelve-mile tramp from Croft to Beachborough without burning indignation. It is, however, only fair to him to say that he himself was very properly and thoroughly ashamed of his conduct in this matter. One of his first acts, after it had become evident to him that he really was not going to die, was to send the flea-bitten gray over to Dr. Soames's stable; the brown cob was, in a like becoming spirit, dispatched by train to Colonel Finch; while to Mr. Gervis he made the only amends in his power, in the shape of a handsome letter of apology for having married his daughter upon false pretenses.

That gentleman did not fail to point out to him by return of post that such an expression of regret, if insincere, was discreditable, and, if genuine, in the last degree uncomplimentary to the lady; adding a hope that, if Geneviève should ever see reason to concur in it, she would profit by past experience, and engage her husband in exciting conversation upon the brink of a precipice, not a mere ditch—which last was obviously not to be relied upon as an antidote to the ills of matrimony.

But all this took place long afterwards, when Geneviève had been Lady Croft for more than eighteen months; for it need hardly be said that Freddy did not recover in a day. For many weeks his life hung by a thread. He grew better, and worse, and better again, and the doctors had a grand time of it with him; but no one, except Geneviève, expected that he would ever leave the house alive—much less that he would handle a cricket-bat again, as I saw him doing, only the other day, in a highly effective manner. It was Geneviève, he declares, who saved his life. "My poor old mother," says he, "would have wept me into my grave in a week, don't you know; but Gen stuck to it that I was to get all right, and after a time I said to myself, 'Hang it all! it ain't quite the fair thing to let her go on whipping and spurring like this without making a kick for it.' And so I began to pull myself together."

This view, it may be added, is fully shared by the Dowager, whose love and admiration for Geneviève are unbounded: so much so that experienced persons, after listening to her rhapsodies, are wont to shake their heads, remarking that so much enthusiasm is contrary to the nature of mothers-in-law, and portends a speedy reaction. It is, however, gratifying to be able to state that, to the best of my belief, no coolness has arisen between the two ladies up to the present time of writing.

Now, whether our friend's restoration to health was due to his having "made an effort," after the fashion vainly urged upon her by the relatives of the late Mrs. Dombey, or to his fine constitution, or to the fact that his spine was not as badly injured as had at first been supposed, I shall not pretend to determine; but certain it is that before the spring was far advanced, it was found possible to move him from one room to another upon a wheeled couch, and, shortly afterwards, to take him into the open air for an hour or two every day. This was a great point gained; but it by no means satisfied the aspirations of Geneviève. He was still supposed to be dying, though taking a somewhat unreasonable time over it; and as the days went on, she formed a decided opinion that he would never be permitted to be convalescent until he should have been removed from his present surroundings. Therefore, when the

summer came, she resolved upon taking a bold step. She carried him off *vi et armis* to the German baths, despite the protestations of the Dowager and the reluctant consent of the doctor, and ere long was able to send home a triumphant report of the invalid's progress.

They spent the next winter at Vienna, under the supervision of a famous specialist, whose name it is not prudent to mention in the hearing of Dr. Soames, but whose treatment, to all appearances, achieved a result which his English *confrères* had declared to be all but impossible. Soames will not allow this at all. To begin with, he denies having ever used the word "impossible"; secondly, his diagnosis of the case abundantly proves to all unprejudiced persons that in his judgment there was room for hope from the first; thirdly and lastly, he is prepared to prove, in the clearest possible manner, that the German fellow's course of procedure was utterly irrational. Now, without going quite the same length as Admiral Bagshawe, who roundly asserts that doctors are "a dashed pack of quacks and swindlers, the whole lot of 'em," I will yet venture—being in fairly good health at the present time—to observe that I have found so much diversity of opinion in the ranks of their admirable profession that I should hesitate to accept the decision of any half-dozen of them as absolutely final; and I must say that, whatever their private views may have been, they certainly contrived to convey to my mind, and to those of others, the impression that Freddy Croft was a doomed man. Otherwise I should hardly have taken the fatiguing and most unpleasant walk to which I have alluded. However, he is out of their hands now; so it does not greatly signify. The important thing is that, during the second summer after his accident, he was walking about the alleys of Franzensbad without even the aid of a crutch or a stick. Then it was that he thought fit to send his lardy apology to Mr. Gervis, who was staying at Southlands at the time, and who was kind enough to show me both the letter in question and the reply which he had written to it.

Mr. Gervis is not much at Southlands nowadays. He comes down every now and again, and remains for a week or so; but he has taken a small house in London, which he has heated by means of hot-water pipes to a temperature like that of a conservatory, and which, I believe, he considers his home—so far as he can be said to have a home at all. For the wandering habits of so many years have not forsaken him in his old age, and whenever he appears in Beachborough one may be pretty sure that the white sails of the *Siren* will be seen rounding the pier-heads before long.

Ponetzky died at Nice within a few months of his resumption of his true name and title; and it must be recorded to the credit of the Princess that she took up her abode with him during his last illness, and surrounded him with all the comforts that money could procure. Through her he bequeathed to Geneviève what I dare say was the only possession of any value that he had in the world, a very large and beautiful turquoise, which she has had set in a ring, and always wears. Immediately after the news of his death reached England, Mr. Gervis started upon a journey of which the end and object have never transpired; though a chain of circumstantial evidence leads me to suspect strongly that it terminated in the South of France. The reader will scarcely be surprised to hear that he has not resumed the matrimonial collar which for so long a time galled his withers; but, knowing what I do—or, to speak more honestly, knowing as little as I do—of the man, I should be sorry to affirm that he did not offer to perform this act of self-sacrifice. If he indeed did so, Varinka probably had the good sense to decline the generous proposition.

Varinka has returned to Paris, and is once more domiciled in the Boulevard Malesherbes, having doubtless discovered that General Karakoff's inconsiderate behavior has not robbed her of any of her friends, and that the world is, after all, inhabited by a race full of forgiveness and charity, at least towards those who have plenty of money in their pockets. As the Princess appears to have an unlimited supply of this essential blessing, it may be presumed that her visit to St. Petersburg ended satisfactorily. She entertains as liberally as of old; and I understand that a stream of light is often to be seen issuing from the windows of the little room at the end of her suite during the small hours of the morning. It would not astonish me to hear of her having been led to the altar a fourth time; for she is rich and pretty, and still charmingly youthful in appearance, and she is one of those people who never know when they are well off.

Mr. Gervis does not fail to call in the Boulevard Malesherbes whenever he is in Paris; and Claud tells me that his father and the Princess are the best of friends, and that incidents of bygone years are frequently referred to by both of them, without the smallest embarrassment on either side.

"It is astonishing," Mr. Gervis remarked one day to my grandmother, "what an entertaining and agreeable creature a woman can be, so long as you know that you can get away from her as soon as you please. Women, my dear Mrs. Knowles, are like this delightful fire of yours, comforting to sit beside, pleasant to look upon;—but we have all heard of the

painful process by which *pâté de foie gras* is made. My dear madam, do you not pity the poor goose who voluntarily lets himself be tied down in a position from which he cannot escape, and exposes his liver to the certainty of destruction?"

It is not, however, for the sake of chatting with the fascinating Varinka that Mr. Gervis pays such constant visits to the French capital, but to see his son, who lives there, and who would fain induce him to occupy a room which was set apart for his especial use long ago. But Mr. Gervis has always declined to take advantage of this hospitality. He prefers, he says, the independence of a hotel; but perhaps if the truth were known, he does not care to live under the same roof with Nina; for that lady, despite her confident boast of former days, has not yet succeeded in making a conquest of him.

Claud has become one of those whose privilege it is *monstrari digito prætereuntium*. He has earned a high reputation, not only as a writer of plays, but also as an essayist, and has thus gained two separate circles of Parisian admirers; for I imagine that those who appreciate him in the one capacity have little knowledge of his merits as regards the other. He is always busy; he has a large and heterogeneous acquaintance; and he keeps up an establishment in the neighborhood of the Champs Elysées, the cost of which must figure for a respectable sum in his father's banking account. There is, indeed, no longer any reason for Mr. Gervis to be otherwise than generous in his dealings with him; and, as a matter of fact, the young people live at a rate far higher than Claud's literary earnings could possibly warrant. During the summer they usually spend three or four months at Southlands, the owner of the house being commonly absent at that season. Their frequent entertainments, and their readiness to take a share in all local burdens, whether of a charitable or hospitable kind, have secured them a widespread popularity; but, for that matter, Mrs. Gervis is popular everywhere, in France and in England alike. She is, I should fancy, a perfectly contented woman. She is at liberty to employ the most expensive dressmakers, and avails herself of her prerogative; she goes a great deal into the world; she is universally admired; yet she has never given her husband cause for uneasiness on her account a second time. The terrible lesson of two years ago has not been thrown away upon her; and even Beachborough now sings her praises. I know of no one who more adroitly tempers freedom of intercourse with discretion.

As for Claud, everything leads me to believe that he is contented too. He has, at all events, so much to make him so, that he must be very unreasonable if he is not. I don't suppose

that he is supremely happy; but we must not look for a glut of supreme happiness, even in novels. It is surely enough if, at the end of our history, we can point to one household as the home of terrestrial bliss; and as such I really think that Croft Manor may, without exaggeration, be described. Freddy and Geneviève are as much in love with one another as they were on their melancholy wedding-day; and, to all appearance, they are likely to remain so. Their dissimilarity of nature and tastes has proved anything but a misfortune to them. It has opened fresh horizons to them both; it has led them to make mutual willing concessions; and I am sure that neither of them would wish the other to be changed in the smallest particular. They understand one another, in short; they have confidence in one another; and in such a happy state of affairs is to be found, I should suppose, the basis of matrimonial harmony. Their manner of life is far quieter than that of their neighbors at Southlands; but it is by no means dull. Geneviève, as might have been expected, is rather fond of filling the house with disheveled musical *dilettanti;* but Freddy, on his side, stipulates for the introduction of a less intellectual and artistic element into the company; and the two sets of guests have been made to amalgamate without difficulty, and, let us hope, with reciprocal benefit.

The cricket-week is still an annual institution. If the festivities which accompany it are conducted in a somewhat more decorous manner than of old, the change is probably due to the influence of a lady who contrives to make herself obeyed after a quiet fashion; and indeed Lord Lynchester, who stands rather in awe of the present Lady Croft, has been heard to lament that she has not a little more "go" in her. Freddy, he says, isn't half the man he used to be.

"But what can you expect," he adds, "if fellows will go and get married? I can't think what the deuce they do it for. I wish I hadn't, I know!"

To which Colonel Finch responds, "Well, Lynchester, nobody can accuse you of behaving as if you had—eh?—what?"

Miss Potts is often to be seen taking a constitutional in the neighborhood of Croft Manor. She was entreated to make that house her home, but, after some wavering, decided in favor of those rooms on the north side of Oxford Street which had formed the subject of her day-dreams for so long. When she wants a change, she comes down to Croft, knowing that she will always be welcome there. She is happy in the sight of her former pupil's happiness; and I may add that her modest vision has been realized in all its details.

When the Gervises are at Beachborough, there is, of course,

a constant interchange of visits between Croft Manor and Southlands. Freddy has a great affection, not unmixed with reverence, for Claud, whose advice he seeks upon all occasions of importance, and whom he classes in his own mind with Homer, Shakspeare, the author of *Soapy Spunge*, and other geniuses of a lofty order. Claud, for his part, is, I think, as fond of his simple, kind-hearted little brother-in-law as he is of any one in the world. Their friendship grows stronger as they grow older, and neither of them is likely to allow anything to disturb it.

Whether a similar feeling of attachment unites their wives is another question. I have observed that the two ladies never meet without kissing one another; and I have likewise observed that, as soon as this salutation has been accomplished, the countenance of each of them is wont to be illumined by a happy, peaceful smile, such as nothing but the sense of a duty performed and a conscience at ease can call forth. Freddy often remarks what a good thing it is that Geneviève and Nina should be such friends; "because," says he, with one of his knowing looks, "it isn't always that sisters-in-law hit it off, don't you know."

The last news that reached me from Beachborough pointed to a change in the representation of the borough. It is understood that Mr. Pettigrew, who is now a very old man, does not intend to offer himself for re-election; and I hear that certain overtures have been made, and favorably received, and that the chairman of the Conservative party has latterly been in constant communication with Southlands. There is thus fair ground for predicting that, before this book is in the hands of the reader, Claud will be in a position to tack the initials M.P. on to his name. Should this anticipation be realized, I shall expect to hear of his coming to the front in political life in the course of a few years; for he is clever, unassuming, and fond of work; he has a pleasant address, and a sufficient share of ambition; and he is blessed with a wife whose social adaptability may, at some future date, prove of service to him.

THE END.

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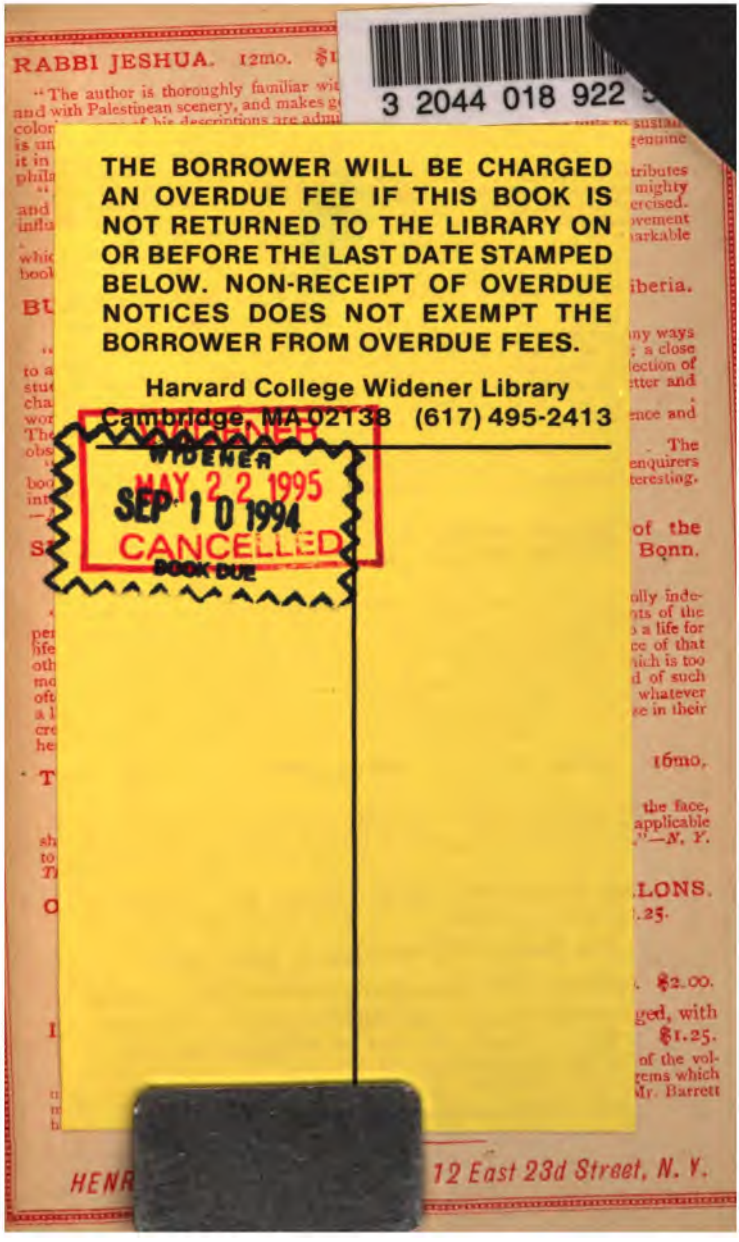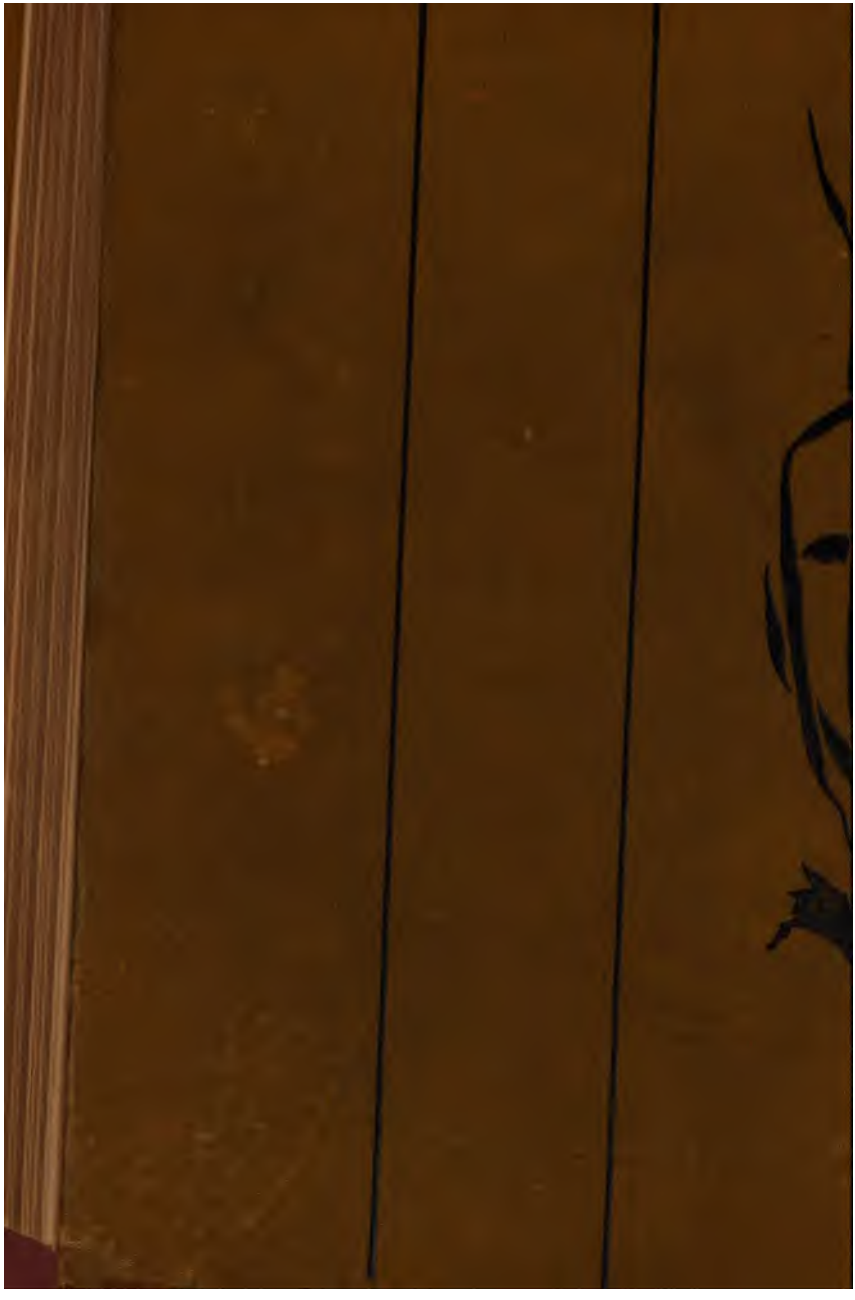
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